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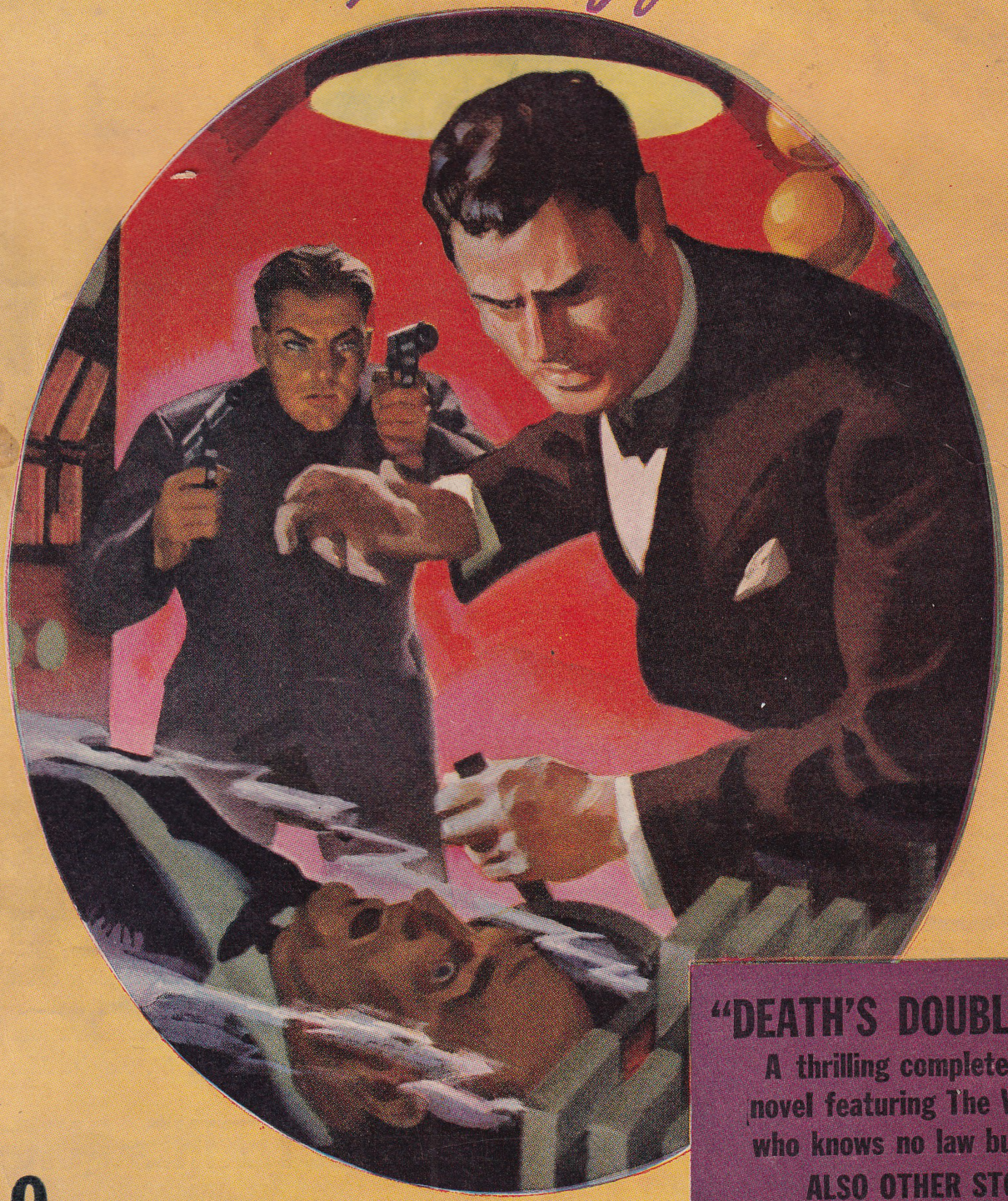
APR. '41

The Long Arm of Justice



"DEATH'S DOUBLECROSS"

A thrilling complete mystery novel featuring The Whisperer, who knows no law but justice!

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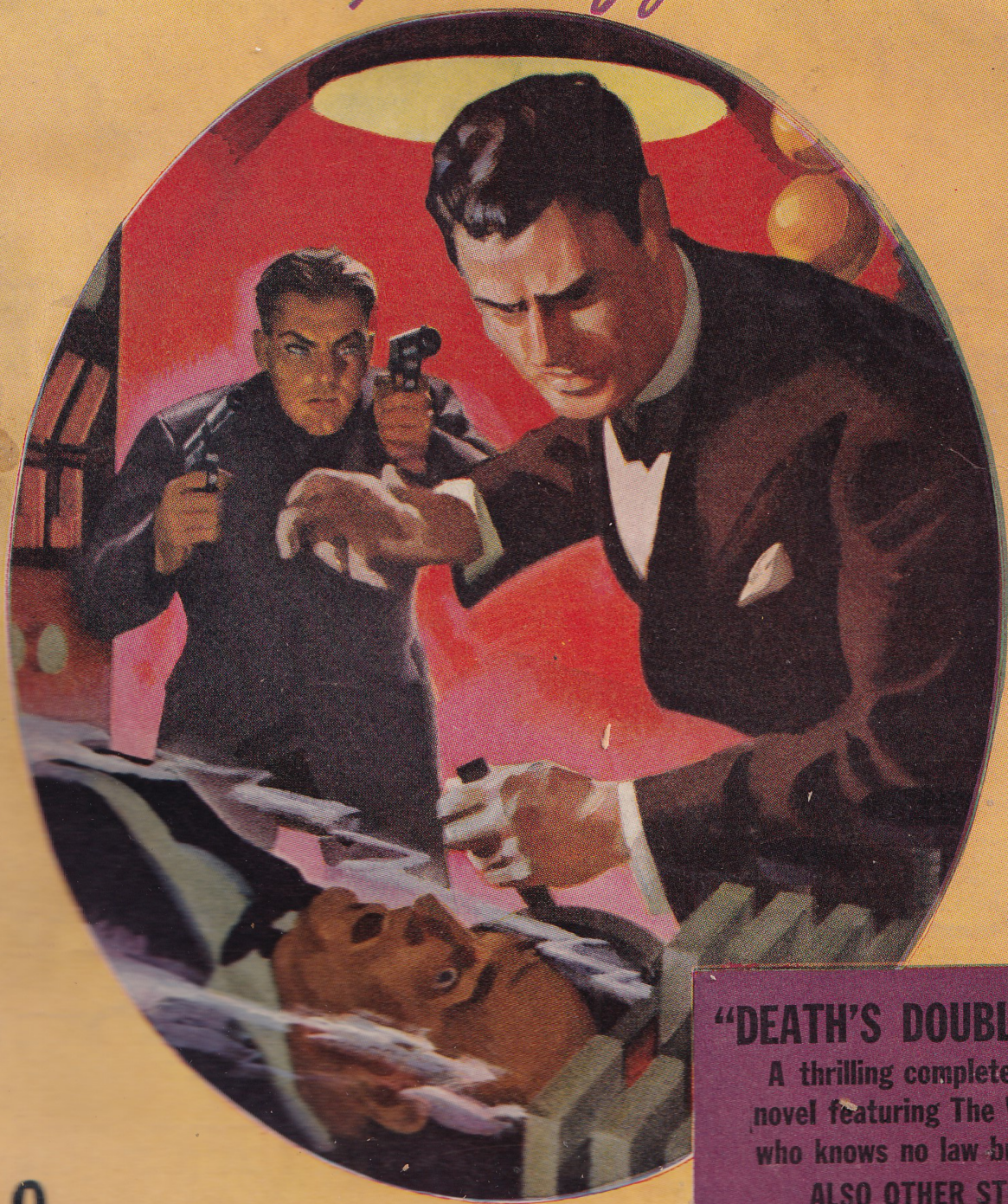

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The WHISPERER

CONTENTS APRIL, 1941 VOL. I NO. 4

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COMPLETE BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL

DEATH'S DOUBLE CROSS . . . . Clifford Goodrich . . 9

There were four directors around the conference table. And there was a fifth—ready to strike in a horrible fashion! For one of the directors was found dead—electrocuted by a power cable. The Whisperer, the enigmatic foe of crime, plunges headlong into this difficult case to halt one of the biggest coups in the history of business—the plan of a master murderer.

NOVELETTE

THE INVISIBLE MENACE . . . . . Norman A. Daniels . . . 72

There didn't seem to be any reason for those murders. Accidents? Or maybe they had something to do with that grim warning on the headstone and the spirits of men long dead. Dynamite Dolan had to find out—and still hold onto his own life.

THRILLING STORIES AND FEATURES

COP COURAGE . . . . . Milton Lowe 87

"Bob," Mike O'Neil's voice came over the phone. "I'm in Room 615 at the Crown Hotel. I called to tell you I'm checking out *permanently!*" . . . It meant but one thing—Neff Jackson was adding Mike to his murder string. And Detective Bob Riley had to stop him!

COPS DON'T SQUARE MURDER . . John Jay Chichester . 102

But can a cop return a favor when there's a murder involved? Detective MacNary didn't think twice when Rick Hale asked for help in a murder frame.

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Highlights behind the stories in our magazine.

COVER BY HUBERT ROGERS

All stories in this magazine are fiction. No actual persons are designated either by name or character. Any similarity is coincidental.

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WITH THE WHISPERER

We've been getting a very encouraging lot of mail from our readers, which makes us feel better than ever. Of course, it is possible to put out a magazine that goes over with the readers without getting so much as a single letter, but that's not the usual result. If you have something that people like, they'll not only buy it, but take occasion to tell you about it. If they don't like it, a few of them will tell you why, but most of them will just stop buying it, and you'll know very quickly that they don't like it!

Among the many letters we've received are a few complaints, and we don't mind bringing them up, because, after all, that's how we can make the magazine better than before. What do the rest of you readers think about some of these points?

First, a few readers object to the love interest between Wildcat Gordon, otherwise The Whisperer, and Tiny Traeger. Actually, the stories haven't much love in them, except for the implication that these two are "that way" about each other without admitting it. It does add a little human touch to characters who otherwise might not sound real. What should we do? Do most of our readers really want these stories without any love element, or shall we keep it in? The more replies we get to this query, the better will we be able to judge just what to do about it.

Others want the stories to be much longer than they are. As we print them now, they're complete novels, long enough, we feel, to give you a very good story, completely told. If we make them longer, we'd have to drop a story or two from the back of the book, and you couldn't get an assortment such as we have in this issue—a novelette and two short stories. If you readers want The Whisperer longer, let us know; if you want to keep it as it is, giving you a chance to read excellent short stories as "dessert" in our fare of good detective fiction, we'll stick to it. Again, the more letters we get, the better we like it.

To those of you who have written us how much you like the character, and how glad you are to see him appearing in long stories after such a successful career in the short tales that appeared in *The Shadow* magazine, our sincere thanks, and you can be sure that we'll keep on trying to do the best we can to please you!

The novel which starts on Page 9 of this issue, "Death's Double Cross," is one of the best Whisperer yarns thus far. There's more to it than just a crime problem, just a murder to be solved. There is a scheme behind it which not only baffles the police, but has The Whisperer himself buffaloed for quite some time before he cracks through to the real cause behind the plot. In other words, it's one of those stories that are extremely hard to "guess at," and that you'll have to go right through to the end before you can be sure who the villain is. If you find out much sooner, you can count yourself as having an extremely well-trained deductive mind,

or being pretty lucky! In either case, you'll enjoy the story.

What would you do if you were a policeman, or a detective, and a friend of yours came to you saying he was mixed up in a murder—a murder that was so fixed that it seemed impossible for you to get out of it. Would you believe your friend that it was a frame-up and start working from that angle, or would you consider your friend—especially a friend who had once saved your life—as much a suspect as anyone else? "Cops Don't Square Murder," on Page 101, is that kind of a story. Dig right into it and see what this cop does.

Are you looking for some excellent reading matter that is as good as it possibly can be? Street & Smith have published many detective magazines, and can truthfully say that they've had the best. Now, we've collected the best of the best, and put them all into the Street & Smith *Detective Story Annual,* a large-size, thick, heavy-covered book, which you can get at your newsstand or book store. It contains four complete book-length novels, and four long novelettes, all in an attractive form which will look swell in any home, and give you plenty of reading matter for the small price of twenty-five cents. You can see more about this on Page 8 of this issue.

"The Invisible Menace," the novelette by Norman A. Daniels in this issue, will give you a taste of the unusual in detective stories. It's one job to catch a murderer when he is flesh and blood; it's quite another job to pin murder on a ghost, or a spirit, or a curse! Dynamite Dolan, a dick as tough as his name implies, and as easily explodable,

Continued on page 113

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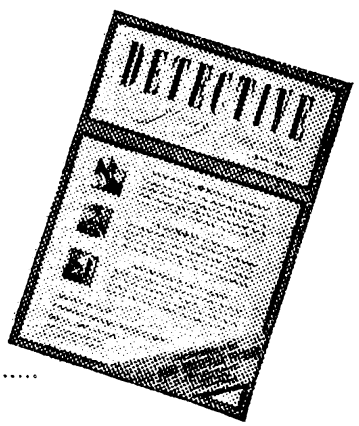

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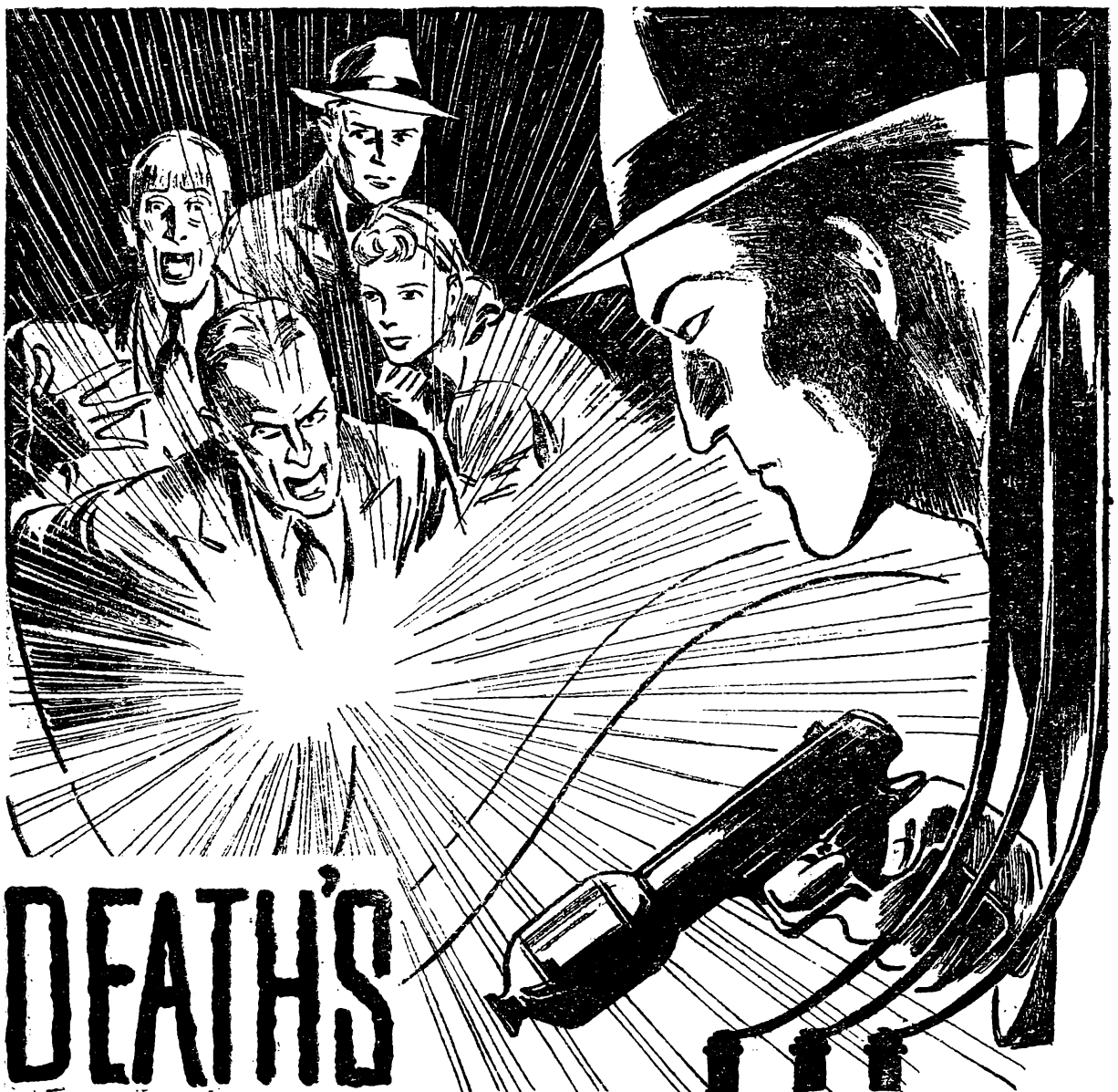

DEATH'S DOUBLE CROSS

By Clifford Goodrich

A Complete Whisperer Novel

Only two men knew the secret of the Electrical Industries test rooms—now one was dead, murdered! Did the other seek it all for himself, or was there a more sinister force entering into this insane struggle for power?

Kirk Mannersly was a wispy rabbit of a man. Restless, watery eyes darted furtively as he opened the door a crack and peered into the huge laboratory of Electrical Industries, Inc.

Mannersly chuckled to himself like a satisfied hen. Then he pad-

ded softly past row upon row of powerful electrical apparatus toward a round table at one end of the room. There was a constant hum in the great place, an ever-present scent of ozone caused by electric arcs of tremendous voltage.

Mannersly smiled thinly and sat down at one of the four chairs at the table. He shook hands with himself and spoke in a dry, brittle voice.

"I will vote with Gall," he said to no one in particular. "I know now that he is on the right track."

Mannersly chuckled happily again, as if he enjoyed some pleasant secret all his own. His chuckling sound blanketed the quiet closing of a door behind his back. He might not have been so pleased had he realized that he was not entirely alone.

Kirk Mannersly was one of the four directors of Electrical Industries, Inc. He had come early for the meeting that was to decide the future course of the firm. The company owned the current and equipment necessary to manufacture a new type of stainless steel, for which another firm had developed a formula. Properly handled, it might mean millions of dollars.

And few persons knew that Electrical Industries, Inc., was almost bankrupt.

Suddenly there was a scraping of feet at the door. The portal opened and a girl and two men stepped into the room. The other directors had arrived for a meeting that was to be featured on the front page of many a newspaper. But not for reasons that Kirk Mannersly could know.

Outside, an ominous dusk was settling over New York's East River. Thunder rumbled out of the sky. Most of the nearby factories that backed up to swank apartment houses were dark, the work finished for that day.

Against the light that gleamed from the ground-floor windows of Electrical Industries, Inc., a dark figure moved like a wraith. Then it merged with the blackness of the farther wall.

There was only a baleful flash of two tiny points of illumined jade. The dim light of the window showed slanted, Oriental-appearing eyes that glowed with a cold greenness. Below them, an oddly pointed chin was buried in the collar of a coat as black as the descending night itself. The man had black hair, black clothes and black shoes. He was almost invisible as he glided into the shadow of the old brick wall.

An eerie, chilling whisper drifted behind him then. For the wraithlike figure was The Whisperer, mysterious figure who preyed on crime and criminals that were beyond the reach of police and the law. Where The Whisperer stalked, crime was frequently poised for a major blow.

The Whisperer glanced at the four figures assembling at the round table beyond those windows. Then he glided into the darkness. As he did, another form moved silently across the background of light. The silhouette showed only that it was a huge man who towered a good six feet into the darkness. This one, too, disappeared in the direction The Whisperer had taken.

The encounter between the two may have been accidental, due to the sudden blackness of the cloud-swept night. There was the muffled sound of the impact of two bodies. Then huge hands seized The Whisperer. Smaller, compact fists of the foe of crime smashed up into the jaw of the larger man.

The big man grunted, relaxed his hold. Then The Whisperer faded

into the night. The Whisperer did not ordinarily shrink from combat. But he had work to do; there were plans with which he hoped to thwart the stroke of crime he feared was on the way.

The two men and the girl who had just entered the big room shook hands with Kirk Mannersly. The girl was slimly beautiful. Her blond hair and youthful, pink-cheeked complexion made one wonder how she happened to be a director in a corporation such as Electrical Industries, Inc. It happened that upon the death of her father, Mary Jane Weldon had inherited a twenty-percent interest in the company and had insisted on voting that stock herself.

A young, dark-haired man seated Mary Jane with an obvious possessiveness. And it was a fact that society expected any day to read of the engagement of Mary Jane to Roger Merrill, who also owned twenty percent of Electrical Industries.

The other man was gaunt and gray-haired. He grunted and darted an uncertain glance at the others as he slid into his chair. Belknap I. Gall owned forty percent of the firm. With any other one of the directors he could control it. But up to this moment, none of them had shown a willingness to go along with his plan.

Gall cleared his throat and rose to open the meeting. He pounded on the table with gnarled fingers. It was a stanch oak in industry that Belknap I. Gall had been in the more palmy days. Mr. Big, his competitors and associates had called him then, borrowing on his initials.

The storm broke outside as Gall began to speak. His voice was no longer the compelling roar that had brought industrial giants to their knees before the power of Mr. Big. It was now high, shrill and querulous.

"We must keep our price for power high enough to operate," he insisted in a pleading tone. "If we do not, Genung Rhodman will force us into bankruptcy."

The newspapers had carried some stories about Genung Rhodman lately. He was president of Chrome Specialties Corp., and was said to have developed a formula for a stainless steel far superior to anything known to industry. Of utmost importance to armaments and all heavy industry, Rhodman had been unwilling to even patent his discovery until he had completed a contract with a manufacturing corporation. Electrical Industries, Inc., had the current and the huge electric furnaces that could be quickly made available for rapid manufacture.

Handsome, dark-haired Roger Merrill was on his feet at Gall's statement. The young man's face drained of color, and his words came harshly.

"Rhodman will pay a fair price," he snapped. "If we ask too much, we won't get the contract for this superstainless steel at all."

"You're a traitor," Gall shrilled. His mouth worked strangely. "You've sold out to Rhodman! If we give a low price, we won't be able to deliver and will have to forfeit. Rhodman could take us over then, lock, stock and barrel!"

Merrill sank back into his chair. Perspiration stood out on his forehead.

"It's not true," he muttered. "Our price is too high. Anyway, you can't do it alone. We'll outvote you."

Mary Jane Weldon nodded. It was obvious that she would vote whatever way Roger advised her. And up to that moment they'd been

sure of Kirk Mannersly. But the wisp of a man chuckled now in his dry, brittle voice. He rubbed his hands together, enjoying the bombshell he was going to toss.

"I think Gall is right," he smirked. "I've decided to cast my lot with his."

Roger Merrill leaped to his feet. He yelled something, but it was lost in a great flash of lightning and a thunderclap that shook the building to its foundations. A crackling roar welled up from one corner of the room where a huge generator had short-circuited. The lights dimmed, then went out. All the directors sprang from their chairs.

Suddenly there was a high-pitched whine and a tremendous increase in the odor of ozone. A shower of sparks cascaded over the room. There was a scream of pain and terror, followed by a peculiar barbecue smell. Jane Weldon found the emergency switch that controlled an independent lighting generator.

The lights came on, dimly at first. Jane advanced the rheostat leading from the generator. The lights flashed on in full brilliance. Then Jane screamed.

Almost at her feet lay the body of Kirk Mannersly, the director who had just voted against Roger Merrill and the girl!

Gaunt Belknap Gall rushed across the room and stooped quickly over Mannersly. When he looked up, his parchmentlike face had taken on a slightly greenish tinge.

"C-c-cooked!" he piped shrilly. "H-he's cooked l-l-like a roasted pig!"

Roger Merrill walked uncertainly to the body. Jane Weldon screamed and fainted. Roger abandoned the body of Kirk Mannersly then.

"Water!" he yelled. He raced toward a water cooler just outside the big room.

A janitor stood near it, leaning dejectedly on the handle of a broom. Clad in faded overalls, he didn't seem to have enough intelligence to grasp what was going on. As Merrill repeated his demand for water, the janitor shuffled toward the water cooler and extracted a paper cup from a container on the side. He handed that to Merrill.

He shuffled along behind the young director as he raced back to Jane Weldon with his cup of water. The girl's eyelids fluttered as the water touched her lips; then she sat erect. Belknap Gall stood over the roasted body of Kirk Mannersly. He looked from the body to a snakelike cable that lay on the floor.

"High frequency from No. 2 furnace," he muttered. "That furnace develops nearly four thousand degrees Fahrenheit."

Roger helped Jane to her feet. Both looked at the cable. It seemed that the power cable of a huge fifty-ton electric furnace had snapped in the blast of lightning that had struck the building. The three directors looked at each other with blank expressions.

They were unquestionably thinking about death at the moment. But they probably were also thinking of what the death of Kirk Mannersly could mean. Until his estate should be probated and his twenty percent of stock disposed of, control of Electrical Industries, Inc., was stalemate. Gall owned forty percent, and between them, Roger and the girl owned a like percentage of the stock.

The look of defiance that flashed between Merrill and the elderly president brought the thought of that stalemate out into the open. Gall's mouth worked in an appearance of frustrated anger.

"I'll not yield," he muttered. "You shan't take advantage of a thing like this."

But the situation took a sudden turn then. None of the directors had been paying any attention to the shabby janitor. But now they did. Strange sounds came from the lips of the janitor. He pointed at a fire ax that lay near the corpse on the floor. He stooped over awkwardly and picked it up.

Then the janitor moved toward the cable. He laid the ax beside the severed end of the snakelike conduit and motioned toward the three directors. Belknap Gall gulped and bent over the cable end. Then shrill words burst from his lips.

"This cable didn't snap!" he shrilled. "It was cut; slashed cleanly with the fire ax!"

Gall straightened, shook a gnarled fist under the nose of Roger Merrill.

"You've murdered him," he yelled. "You murdered him to keep us from saving Electric Industries from certain bankruptcy."

Roger's face was as white as the handkerchief that peeped from his breast pocket. His dark eyes blazed with rage as he confronted the older man.

"You lie, Gall! I didn't touch that ax. Now I demand that it be examined for fingerprints!"

Belknap Gall looked the ax handle over cautiously. He muttered to himself, took a pair of pince-nez glasses from an old-style leather case. His face looked baffled as he examined the wooden handle.

An eerie, whispering sound that seemed to come from no direction made him lift his gaze. The chilling quality of that whispering challenge made Gall shudder slightly. Merrill and the girl seemed to flinch. All three looked quickly around the room.

But there was no other figure in sight except the janitor. None of the directors had paid enough attention to the man to know what he really looked like. They did not realize that the real janitor had taken a night off at the suggestion of a friend of his. The real janitor had confided to a man named Dunk Smith, with whom he often drank a casual glass of beer, that there was a strange unrest and fear in the plant of Electrical Industries, Inc. Dunk Smith had suggested that the janitor was working too hard and needed a night of relaxation.

For Dunk Smith was a pseudonym of The Whisperer! The mysterious foe of crime had been in on the ground floor of the murder of Kirk Mannersly. And right now The Whisperer was moving unobtrusively toward a door that led to the entrance foyer of the big building. He had seen a furtive movement there.

The three directors did not realize that any drama was being re-enacted before their eyes. They merely saw the shabby janitor sweep his broom toward that door. But when he suddenly whipped it open, a gasp of surprise came from all three of them.

Stooped behind that door, with his eyes at keyhole level, was a tall, heavy-set man with a leonine mane of jet-black hair. The eavesdropper straightened as The Whisperer revealed him.

A shrill cry of rage burst from the thin lips of Belknap Gall.

"Genung Rhodman!"

The president of Chrome Specialties Corp. stepped quickly into the room, his eyes black points of concentration. The man had a compelling, forceful personality. He held up one hand in warning.

"Wait!" he rumbled in a voice that was a heavy, hollow roar. "Do not

jump at any conclusions."

"Wait, nothing!" Belknap Gall shrilled. "Either you or your stooge here murdered Mannersly to get our power at a cheaper rate than it can be produced."

Gall waved at Merrill to indicate whom he considered the stooge of Genung Rhodman. Rhodman's heavy lips curled into a mirthless laugh.

"You're being an ass, Gall," he rumbled. "And to prove it, I'm going to make you an offer."

Belknap Gall's eyebrows raised in surprise. He waited for Rhodman to continue.

"Under certain circumstances," Rhodman concluded, "I will meet the high price you ask for power and equipment!"

CHAPTER II.

THE UNDERWORLD APPEARS.

Belknap Gall may no longer have been the Mr. Big who made tycoons tremble, but he was too old a hand in business to walk into any possible trap without examining it. Rage ebbed from his eyes.

"What are you doing in this building?" he said. "And how long have you been listening to our conversation?"

There was a sharp edge of suspicion in his voice. Genung Rhodman's lips curled into another thick smile.

"I came into the entrance foyer just a moment ago," he shrugged. "I knew you were holding a director's meeting tonight, and I wanted to make you an offer that would permit us to get together."

Gall's expression did not change. "And your offer?"

Genung Rhodman's lips tightened. He looked quickly around. He saw the janitor, still sweeping minute particles from the floor. Apparently he didn't consider the man of importance. He lowered his rumbling voice only slightly. As he spoke, his eyes bored into the three directors who stood before him.

"For reasons best known to myself, I prefer a peculiar type of contract," he stated. "I will pay your price for the rental of power and equipment you possess. The length of the contract and the terms of payment shall be as you demand."

Rhodman paused. Belknap Gall began to pound his gnarled fingers on the top of the directors' table. It was a nervous habit he had when agitated. His nose was wrinkled as if he smelled a rat somewhere but couldn't quite locate it.

"Where's the catch?" he demanded. "What are the rest of the conditions?"

Rhodman's words cracked like a whip.

"My own men must supervise and carry out all processes of the manufacturing," he said. "I will pay you more than your power is worth for complete and secret control of its usage."

Belknap Gall began to jump up and down in renewed rage.

"That's worse. That's terrible!" he shrilled. "You can use any unworkable formula to the point of boosting production costs beyond our power to meet them. Then we will have to forfeit anyway, and you can take us over!"

Gall began shaking his gnarled fist under Genung Rhodman's nose. Rhodman could have broken him in two with one of his hamlike hands. Roger Merrill stepped in between the two industrialists.

"Let's think this thing over," he suggested. "Maybe it is not as bad as it sounds. Rhodman may be giving us something straight."

There was an eerie, whispering sound again in the room. The shabby

janitor leaned on his broom, stared at Genung Rhodman. While The Whisperer had not made up his mind about Rhodman's true motives, there were two things that did not check in his story.

Rhodman had said he entered the foyer only a moment before his discovery. But it had been raining outside for a dozen minutes before that. And Genung Rhodman's shoes were quite dry!

The Whisperer also recalled the encounter he had had with the man in the darkness outside. He had smashed one compact fist against the jaw of that one. And he now noticed a discolored welt on the jaw of Genung Rhodman!

The three men looked around the room again, trying to ascertain the source of that weird whisper. But Jane Weldon brought them back to subjects more practical.

"Don't you think we ought to phone the police?"

The cooked corpse of Kirk Mannersly was, after all, still stretched out on the floor.

Genung Rhodman's black eyes surveyed the others in close scrutiny. He bestowed a particularly sour look upon Gall.

"Since you suspect me," he rumbled, "I shall call them myself."

He lumbered to the big round table and picked up the phone that was cradled on one end of it. The wire, charred and useless, fell apart like so much dust. Either the bolt of lightning, the short-circuited generator, or the cut cable of the electric furnace had put the telephones out of commission.

Rhodman twisted his thick lips into a wry smile.

"I'll go around the corner to the nearest phone," he decided.

Belknap Gall's shrill voice kept on accusing.

"You'll go nowhere without my watching you," he snapped. "We'll leave the watchman here to guard the body. I don't want to lose sight of any of you."

Rhodman grinned again in sardonic contempt. He strode to the door, paying no attention to who might be following. Skinny Belknap Gall padded along in his wake. Apparently because they could think of nothing better to do, Roger Merrill and the girl went along.

The shabby janitor lost his apparent lethargy as the door swung shut behind Rhodman and the directors of Electrical Industries, Inc. The Whisperer had sensed crime afoot in the worried reports of the real janitor whose place he had taken for this night.

But the foe of crime had none of the answers that lay behind it. He knew that Genung Rhodman had a formula of tremendous value that needed equipment and power, such as Electrical Industries possessed, for its manufacture. But he also knew that there were other firms, though perhaps not so conveniently located, which could supply these commodities.

He also realized that control of both such a formula and the proper equipment and power would put their owner in a position to dictate to millions. There had been a casual contempt for Belknap Gall thinly veiled in the attitude of Genung Rhodman. But there had also been the worried caution that made him demand secret control of the power source he was contracting to use.

The Whisperer dropped his broom, leaned quickly over the corpse of Kirk Mannersly, the one director who had decided to throw his lot in with that of the gaunt president

What had happened to the man

was unbelievable, even with the terrific power that was fed to the electrodes of the furnace that developed a temperature of four thousand degrees for the smelting of high-grade chrome steel. Mannersly had apparently come in contact with that cable and been practically destroyed in half a dozen seconds.

A chuckling whisper of surprise emitted from the crime foe's lips as he stood erect and padded from the room. He went through the door that Kirk Mannersly had used for entrance when he came in chuckling to himself in satisfaction. That door led into a small office. There were a desk, several ledgers and a filing cabinet of letters and miscellaneous records of the business of Electrical Industries, Inc.

Neither the ledgers nor the filing cabinet yielded anything of interest to The Whisperer. Crime that was moving in the halls of industry was not spread out on a table for casual eyes to grasp—if indeed there was crime to be found at all in this palace of modern power.

In a wastebasket, The Whisperer found the only item of interest in the place. But that was devoid of any meaning that the keen brain of the foe of the underworld could grasp. It was a torn slip of paper bearing a simple equation:

SI9000:225

The Whisperer stood erect, holding the torn slip of paper. The inscription was in soft pencil strokes. It might mean much. It might be merely the casual scribbling of a man whose mind had been considering other problems, like the scrawling one does waiting for a phone call; numbers that mean not a thing. Carefully he replaced the slip in the wastebasket.

A soft chuckle of bewilderment drifted from The Whisperer as he turned from the room. His mind was wandering, trying to grasp a problem as he padded across the floor of the great laboratory and the directors' room. The crime fighter's mind was trying to find an answer to the strange battle that confronted him.

His concentration on that was probably the reason that he did not instantly realize that he was no longer alone. The first man who came through the door from the entrance foyer made little sound. He gestured wildly to the men who were behind him.

Then thugs boiled in from doors and windows. Guttural cries of hate rose into the air. Crime in the high towers of finance and industry was no longer the sole foe of The Whisperer. The underworld had been called in en masse.

"The Whisperer!" a scarred leader rasped. "Get him, now! We got twenty men. The Whisperer's alone."

The drab disguise dropped from the janitor. A hissing cry of challenge came from the lips of The Whisperer. Crime had recognized its nemesis. And The Whisperer took up that defy.

Guns roared as the crime foe weaved back into the labyrinth of electrical apparatus. Lead and steel-jacketed slugs screamed through the air. Sparks of heat and death crackled as bullets short-circuited power lines and generator feeders. Thugs died from pure ignorance of the power of high-tension wires.

But other thugs kept clear of the terrible power of modern electricity. They kept in the open, crouching, their guns blasting lead at the weaving form of their enemy.

That assault brought two answers:

One was the hissing whisper from The Whisperer's lips. The other came from two queer weapons that seemed to leap into the crime foe's hands. They looked like oddly oversize automatics. No blasting roar came from those twin muzzles. There was only a hissing such as the escape of highly compressed air from tiny jets. Lurid blue flame spewed into the air.

Thugs screamed and sought quick cover. They knew the devastating power of The Whisperer's supersilenced automatics. Death took killers to the floor, sent them writhing in final agony.

The scarred leader squalled quick orders then, telling his men to get clear of The Whisperer. As he yelled his instructions he dodged behind a huge condenser. With one hand he hurled an egg-shaped bomb. It exploded beside the crime fighter's feet, sending up a dense cloud of whitish smoke. Slowly The Whisperer sank to the floor. He had held his breath, but not quite quickly enough. One whiff of the gas sent his senses reeling.

The scarred leader cautioned his men to hold their breaths. Quickly he opened a window to drive off the remnants of the gas. Then he advanced upon The Whisperer and quickly tied him.

Crime's foe was tightly in the grasp of the underworld!

When The Whisperer opened his eyes, triumphant gunmen sneered at him. The mob leader strutted up and down the floor of the laboratory, vastly pleased with his accomplishment. The Whisperer recognized his ugly face. Knife Jorgan was known not because of his proficiency with the blade, but because of the number of knife cuts he had absorbed.

Knife Jorgan was a man who hired out thugs like a messenger service hires out runners. Knife cared not what the job might be nor who wanted to have it done. Murder for profit in a tightly knit organization was his livelihood and that of the killers who worked for him. Knife was gloating now. He'd done something that was pretty smart.

"The boss didn't know this guy was here," he rasped in a voice that sounded like pebbles thrown against a washtub. "He just told us to watch the joint to keep out trouble. But we'll get a bonus for grabbing this guy."

One of his henchmen grinned.

"Yeah," he agreed. "It's worth something to keep this bird out of anybody's hair. It's a good thing you recognized him."

The Whisperer was tightly bound. But it was not peculiar that none of the thugs went too close to him. Other thugs had made that error when they thought the wraithlike crime foe was well secured. Few of them were still alive.

A soft chuckle escaped The Whisperer. The presence of Knife Jorgan and his mob told him one important thing. He had thought that the murder of Kirk Mannersly might have been something done in the pinch of crime's emergency; that a blundering amateur might be behind whatever evil was afoot.

That one murder might have been suddenly decided upon. But he knew now that the criminal brain behind this thing had planned his evil acts; had employed shock troops in advance to take care of whatever might go wrong. The Whisperer wondered if Genung Rhodman's sudden proposition to meet the price of Belknap Gall had been an honest offer to expedite a plan of action, or whether it had been a red herring to

hide some obscure inner purpose.

The Whisperer did not know that answer, but he did know that there was something in the relationship between Chrome Specialties Corp. and Electrical Industries, Inc., that was not on the open books. And he knew that until he found out what that was, crime would continue to bring death to those who blocked its path.

That was if The Whisperer lived to learn more than now stared him in the face.

The crime foe's contemplations were suddenly interrupted by a thug who raced into the laboratory from the entrance foyer to the plant. He was a rat-faced thug known as Weasel, who had been on Knife Jorgan's pay roll longer than the police liked to admit.

"Cops!" he yelled. "They must have heard the shootin'!"

The cops came like the rains came in India. They poured in through doors and windows. Some of them clambered down from the roof. Two burly men led the bluecoats on their raids. One of them was a gorilla of a man with a jaw like a bulldog. His voice roared like the wind in a cavern. He was Slug Minor, whose real name was Horace, personal chauffeur to Commissioner James (Wildcat) Gordon. Slug poured in through the door blasting with a pair of Police Positives. As he battled, he yelled; the louder he yelled, the harder he fought.

The other leader of the cops took a slightly more cautious route into the building. He climbed down through the roof. This man was a large, long-nosed individual with small eyes and a fishlike mouth.

Deputy Commissioner Henry Bolton whined orders in a nasal voice that sounded like a child's complaint. Henry had only two ambitions in life: One was to capture The Whisperer, and the other was to replace Wildcat Gordon as commissioner of police. He and Slug Minor did not see eye to eye on the latter. Sometimes they nearly took eye for eye in their disagreement.

Knife Jorgan tried gas bombs on the attacking police. But the cops pulled masks from their kits. Then Knife hurled smoke bombs to cover a hurried retreat. The mobbies didn't have time to carry a struggling Whisperer with them. Knife got a brilliant idea.

"We'll come back when it's over," he said. "Knock him out again and shove him in that empty furnace; then we can find out what the boss wants us to do with him."

The empty furnace was an old coke-burning blast unit half hidden in one corner. Weasel and Jorgan picked up the tightly bound crime foe and carried him to the furnace. Knife sledged with a blackjack. Then he grunted in satisfaction and shoved The Whisperer in through the door. They closed it and escaped in the smoke, blasting lead as they went.

When the smoke cleared, Bolton surveyed the scene with a measure of content. Six dead gunmen lay on the floor. Some were wounded but conscious. Bolton stalked among them, propped some of them up into chairs. He slapped faces with a rough open hand.

"What were you doing here?" Henry demanded. "Who hired you, and what were you after?"

Henry had obviously left headquarters before the call had come in concerning the murder of Kirk Mannersly. The thugs sniveled their answers, admitted that they worked for Knife Jorgan. But that did no particular good. Knife Jorgan was

a fugitive from justice, anyway, and the thugs did not know the real purpose of their vigil outside the plant.

Slug Minor caused a minor sensation when he stumbled over the corpse of Kirk Mannersly. Slug read everything he could get his huge hands on, including the tabloids. He'd seen Mannersly's pictures.

"Hey, this stiff is no thug," Slug rumbled. "He's a director of this company."

Bolton whirled around, instantly interested. But Henry suddenly forgot about the corpse that was cooked. A crook he had been questioning made a bid for leniency to Henry. He knew of the two ambitions of the narrow-nosed deputy.

"The Whisperer," the wounded mobbie stammered. "He . . . he's in that furnace."

Henry Bolton instantly forgot about everything else. He asked more questions.

Then Henry's small mouth twisted into what he considered a smile. The Whisperer, unconscious and tied, was at hand! With a nasal laugh, Deputy Bolton stepped quickly to the old furnace and whipped open the door.

A whispering challenge met the deputy. Blue flame lanced from the furnace. The Whisperer was there, but he was not unconscious and not tied!

The crime foe had rolled his head away from the impact of Knife Jorgan's blackjack. Inside the furnace, he had wriggled free of his bonds. The enemy of crime was cornered now in a fortress that would resist any gun the police carried. Like Horatio at the bridge, he was well equipped to hold off an army as long as his ammunition lasted.

Cops dared disaster to converge on that furnace. Police revolvers roared like cannon within the confines of the building. Blue flame leaped out with a hiss of compressed air. Lead sang from the maw of the furnace.

The carnage was terribly apparent. But no serious wound was suffered by the converging policemen. It was the rapidity and accuracy of the fire that decided Bolton to slam shut the door of the furnace.

"We got him!" Henry yelled nasally. "Reinforcements are on the way. We'll give him plenty of gas and take him out limp."

Half a dozen cops surrounded the old blast furnace to guard The Whisperer's prison. Henry gloated that at last he had cornered the one crook Wildcat Gordon had never been able to catch. Then a cop burst into the door and ran up to Henry. He reported the call that had come into headquarters about the killing of Kirk Mannersly.

Bolton's small mouth pursed into an O. He seemed suddenly to realize that there was something more here than a routine gang fight.

"Where are Gall and Rhodman?" Henry yelled.

CHAPTER III.

TREASON IN CHROME.

In that part of midtown Manhattan, the industrial water front of the East River rubs a grimy elbow with the towering apartments and hotels of New York's well-to-do. And beneath the sprawling multiple dwellings there is night life for those who can spend.

The nearest public phone to Electrical Industries, Inc., was in the soft-lighted bar of the Club Sabina. Genung Rhodman made the call to police headquarters with Belknap Gall standing at his elbow. Debutants and eligible young men in eve-

ning attire lounged at the sleek bar. Roger Merrill and Mary Jane Weldon stood there, waiting for Gall and Rhodman to complete their call.

A once-handsome young man in tails and top hat weaved uncertainly toward them. China-blue eyes peered from a pink-and-cream complexion, surmounted by hair so white it seemed falsely platinum. The young man grinned happily when he recognized Mary Jane Weldon. He seemed to wriggle like an amiable puppy, somewhat fearful of a reprimand from its master.

It was well known that Titus Vanderlee III was still a hopeful suitor for the hand of Jane Weldon. While it seemed that Roger Merrill had the inside track, young Titus never seemed to give up hope. Aside from the fact that he was usually drunk and spent money like water, Titus was classed as a quite eligible young man of wealth.

Mary Jane Weldon's blue eyes lighted in friendly greeting as Titus weaved up to her. After the horrible experience of the evening, any friendly face seemed extremely welcome to her. The girl held out one slim hand to Titus. The young man bowed elaborately, if somewhat uncertainly, as he took it.

"Shwonderf'l t'shee you," Titus managed. "Shwonderf'l how wonderf'l you look."

A fleeting expression of impatient irritation crossed the handsome features of Roger Merrill. He seemed about to interrupt, but apparently he thought better of it. Gall and Rhodman were striding back from the phone booth as Jane spoke to the white-haired playboy.

"Oh, Titus," Jane murmured, "I don't know what to think! Kirk Mannersly has been killed, and things are horribly confused."

Swiftly, the girl outlined what had happened during the night. Titus Vanderlee looked owlishly at her as if he were trying to understand. Titus was, through inheritance, an inactive stockholder of Rhodman's Chrome Specialties Corp. Apparently Jane trusted Titus. At any rate, she knew that Titus' fondness for her could be expected to bring a truthful answer. Her eyes were large with troubled questions.

"I don't know whether Rhodman is really trying to wreck our concern or not, Titus," she said unhappily. "I don't know whether to side with Belknap Gall or not."

Titus Vanderlee tried to screw his face up into an expression of concentration and wisdom. It seemed to be just a bit beyond him.

"Sh-sh-ish a shame," he got out finally. "I—"

Another voice interrupted Titus then. It was a harsh voice, like pebbles thrown against a washtub. Knife Jorgan strode into the barroom, followed by Weasel and half a dozen gunmen.

"This is a stick-up!" Jorgan grated. "Get 'em up and reach high."

Hands reached quickly for the ceiling. No one in that place was foolish enough to defy two cradled submachine guns. Knife Jorgan darted his killer eyes about the room. He seemed strangely hesitant and did not act like a thug leading a daring night-club holdup. If Jorgan received a signal from any person in that room it was well concealed. But apparently he did.

Jorgan suddenly swung around.

"Never mind the damper, boys," he rasped. "We'll just grab the dame."

Two of his men seized Mary Jane Weldon. A rumble of rage came thickly from Titus Vanderlee III. He made an uncertain lunge toward the mobsters. But Roger Merrill lunged at the same instant. The

two men got tangled up. Knife Jorgan laughed raspingly, sledged down with the butt of his automatic. Both men stumbled to their knees.

Before anyone else could move effectively, the mobbies had backed out of the place with Mary Jane Weldon a prisoner!

Roger Merrill stumbled to his feet. With a bellow of rage, he plunged out of the door. Genung Rhodman followed him at a dead run. Titus Vanderlee had been hit harder than Merrill. He groped his way to the bar and asked for a double Scotch.

Belknap Gall stood uncertainly for a moment. Sweat stood out on his face. Unconsciously he rapped his gnarled fingers against the bar.

"Merrill's in with Rhodman," he complained in his piping voice. "They had Jane kidnaped because she was swinging to my viewpoint."

Titus Vanderlee swung around to look at Gall. The suddenness of events had apparently sobered him somewhat. His voice was not as thick as it had been a few moments before. He rubbed the bump on his head reflectively.

"What do you mean, Gall?" he demanded.

Gall shook his skinny head. He explained that he believed Rhodman wanted to get control of Electrical Industries so that he could have complete power over both his formula and the manufacturing facilities. While Gall held voting power equal to both Merrill and Jane Weldon, he did not know what would happen when Mannersly's heirs began to vote the twenty percent he had held.

"Jane has been in Merrill's power," Gall complained. "He has been using her to work with Rhodman."

Titus Vanderlee's pale eyes seemed to smolder. Rage was an emotion seldom seen in the playboy.

THE WHISPERER

● A low, mirthless chuckle, an awesome whisper of defiance, as a half-visible wraith moves through the night. Criminals flee at this eerie challenge, for it announces the arrival of the mysterious nemesis of crime, for whom there are no rules or regulations deterrent in the path of justice—

The Whisperer.

The money he spent seemed to mean nothing to him. In fact, there were few things in life that seemed to matter to him except getting well plastered and staying that way as long as he could.

Right now the double Scotch he had just had seemed to be taking quick effect. There was a lot of Scotch in his system already.

"Sha shame," he maundered. "Wha' c'n we do about it?"

Belknap Gall wiped perspiration from his forehead. Fearful appre-

hension was apparent in his expression. Then his eyes narrowed. The Mr. Big of days gone by seemed to reassert himself. He swung suddenly to the white-haired playboy.

"Get a look at that secret formula of Rhodman's," he suggested. "Then we can stop him from wrecking Electrical Industries. And we can save Jane from Roger Merrill."

Titus Vanderlee pulled himself erect with a mighty effort. He began to pound the bar with one flabby fist. Saving Electrical Industries didn't seem to mean too much to him, but getting Jane Weldon away from Roger Merrill rang a bell.

"Sha fine idea," Titus squalled. "Ish shomeshing I'll do right away."

Titus cocked his top hat at a rakish angle and sailed out of the barroom like a schooner with a heavy list to starboard. Belknap Gall watched him go with eyes that were narrowed now to slits. A grim smile came to his lips now for the first time in the evening. Someone joggled his elbow. At first Gall paid no attention. Then he turned around.

The man who stood there had a face that reminded one of a squirrel. Buckteeth showed beneath a roundish, quivering nose. The man was plumpish in a humped sort of manner. He even held his hands cocked before him like a squirrel holding a tasty nut.

"Don't trust him, Mr. Gall," the man said in a whining voice. "When he sobers up he'll probably forget what he was supposed to do."

The man was Ring Mordat, a director of Chrome Specialties Corp. He sidled up close to Belknap Gall, looked confidentially into the gaunt man's eyes.

"I think Rhodman is going to double-cross us all," Ring Mordat said in his whiny whisper. "He won't let anyone else know what his formula is. He merely tells us that the new stainless steel will be so hard and corrosion-resistant that it will be worth millions."

Belknap Gall recoiled as if he had encountered something foul and repellent.

"I don't want to steal the formula for my own use," he said. "All I want to do is prevent Rhodman from ruining my company."

Ring Mordat was smiling wisely, showing his squirrellike teeth. His eyes had a quality of colorless transparency that made one feel that only the sockets were really there.

"But you still must have it," he said tinnily. "And I think I know where it is."

Belknap Gall swung around. He seemed unhappy about the entire thing. But his eyes were still narrow, his lips still tightly compressed.

"Well?"

Mordat ran his tongue quickly over his buckteeth.

"If you will take care of me, I will get it for you," he said.

Belknap Gall looked at the squirrel of a man without displaying assent or refusal. His gaze seemed to go through the little man, his words seemed addressed to himself.

"I shall probably remain most of the night at the main laboratory," he said softly. "The police are undoubtedly there already."

With that, Belknap Gall left the Club Sabina, heading toward the laboratory where he had left the shabby janitor to guard the cooked corpse of Kirk Mannersly.

CHAPTER IV.

BOLTON'S TRIUMPH.

Belknap Gall was not surprised to find the police actively present in the laboratories of Electrical Indus-

tries, Inc. He was surprised to find so many of them.

The building was entirely surrounded. Inside, a cordon of cops with riot guns ringed the blast furnace in which Henry Bolton had trapped The Whisperer. Roger Merrill raged beside Henry, tugged frantically at his coat sleeve.

"Jane Weldon's been kidnaped, I tell you!" Merrill screamed. "You've got to do something about it."

Bolton jerked away impatiently.

"Later!" he said nasally. "At last, I've got The Whisperer."

Deputy Bolton crept carefully toward the door of the unused blast furnace. He carried a small hose nozzle that was connected to a portable gas container. Behind him, Genung Rhodman gesticulated wildly to Slug Minor.

"Someone ought to get on the trail of that girl," he rumbled in his cavernous voice. "I don't care if he has got The Whisperer."

Slug Minor shrugged.

"Henry's the boss," he grumbled. "And The Whisperer is Henry's grand passion."

Bolton twisted his head and glared at Slug Minor. It was a very superior glare. Henry felt pretty sure of himself now. The capture of The Whisperer might even land him in Wildcat Gordon's job.

"You'll be pounding a beat next week," he sneered at Slug.

Slug tapped his forehead with one finger.

"Henry's a little touched," he told Rhodman. "That's why he's so fond of me."

Bolton's face got red. Slug glared back at him. The burly chauffeur didn't feel too happy. If Henry's feat did put him in Wildcat's office, life would be far from pleasant. But the threat to Wildcat Gordon's job was what really worried Slug Minor.

Before Slug had been a policeman, Wildcat had saved him from a robbery frame-up that would have sent him to Sing Sing for a lengthy stretch.

"Hurry up, Henry," Slug rumbled. "Let's get it over with."

Bolton stuck the hose nozzle in a crack of the furnace door. There was a hissing as the gas rushed from the portable tank into the fire chamber. No consciousness could exist inside the blast unit then. As Bolton reached for the door, a new voice cut into the room.

"Fine work, Henry," the staccato tones rapped out. "I always knew you'd do it in time."

Police Commissioner James (Wildcat) Gordon stepped jauntily into the room. The young commissioner was clad in a new British-cut suit of rich brown covert cloth. His shoes were brown cordovan. Wildcat's hard blue eyes took in the situation at a glance, and his square jaw was set in a sardonic grin. His brown, crinkly hair surmounted a face tanned by wind and weather.

"Open the door, Henry, and let's have him," Wildcat rapped.

Henry Bolton pulled himself up to his full height. And Henry was a big man. His chest puffed out like that of a pouter pigeon. His little eyes glared at Wildcat. For once Henry felt at least the equal of his superior. Henry recalled all the times that Wildcat's efficiency had made him look like a dunce. But even Wildcat had never been able to apprehend The Whisperer.

Henry scowled.

"Things're going to be different now," he gloated.

Then Henry proudly pulled open the door of the furnace. He almost fell flat on his face looking into it.

His eyes looked as if they were going to pop out and drop to the floor.

The blast furnace was empty!

Slug Minor let out a bellowing roar of laughter. He lumbered over and pulled Henry out of the furnace.

"Things are goin' to be different, all right," Slug rumbled. "Exculpate your misapprehension, Henry. Alibi yourself out of this one."

Slug was completely himself again. When he was, he used all the long words he knew. Slug had tried to better his native water-front diction by constantly carting a dictionary around with him. His friends felt he had overtrained a bit at times.

Bolton's mouth made fish motions. He couldn't even find words to snarl back at Slug. He just pointed to a round hole near the top of the big firebox of the furnace.

"S-s-smoke vent," he gulped. "He got away."

"Obviously," a shrill voice interjected. "But why did you let him?"

Bolton cringed as Belknap Gall strode across the room. Behind Gall, squirrellike Ring Mordat bounded. Bolton did everything but salaam before Gall. The skinny industrialist represented power to Henry.

"Y-yes, sir," Henry said, which didn't answer the question. "Anything you say."

Belknap Gall began rapping his knuckles against the wall of the furnace.

"One of my stockholders was killed tonight when he decided to vote his stock with me," Gall shrilled. "Now another one has been kidnaped for the same reason. I demand that she be found."

Gall turned then to Wildcat and told him the things that had happened since the board meeting had been called. He also explained the set-up of the two firms. Wildcat looked sharply at Genung Rhodman.

"Why is it so important for you to have this particular plant?" Wildcat demanded. "There are others in the city capable of furnishing the power and equipment."

Rhodman hesitated. His black eyes seemed smoldering with some unexplained determination.

"Convenience is one thing," the burly inventor explained. "But the other laboratories are all parts of large corporations. I must have one small enough that I can completely control my production."

"Why?" Wildcat asked coldly.

Color crept into the cheeks of Genung Rhodman. He set his thick lips angrily.

"My business," he snarled, "is not public."

Belknap Gall was dancing up and down again in rage.

"I'll tell you why!" he screamed. "He wants to trick me into getting permanent control of my plant."

Gall began cracking his knuckles against Roger Merrill's shoulder.

"This whippersnapper is working with Rhodman," he shrilled. "You ought to lock both of them up."

Roger's face went a dead white. His eyes blazed as he seized the skinny corporation president. For a moment the two grappled in the center of the floor. Wildcat Gordon got between them.

"If you're not careful, I'll lock you all up," he snapped. "Now, just how did Kirk Mannersly die?"

The medical examiner had been examining the body of the murdered director. He stood up at Wildcat's sudden question. There was a look of incredulity in his eyes.

"I believe that an autopsy will show that all bodily functions ceased simultaneously," he said. "The man was cooked almost instantly. Such a general heat under the circum-

stances is scarcely believable. Something which is not possible has happened."

Wildcat Gordon's ice-blue eyes hardened imperceptibly. Just how many people here were lying, he could not tell. But that something dirty and evil lay beneath the surface there was no longer any question. Wildcat came to some quick and far-reaching decisions.

"O. K., Henry," he snapped. "You and Slug return to headquarters. The rest of you are on your own. But stay where I can reach you if I want you."

Wildcat leaned against the empty blast furnace as the others filed out. His sharp eyes missed not a detail of their reactions.

Wildcat smiled grimly, strode from the building. He stopped first at the Club Sabina and grilled one of the bartenders on the kidnaping of pretty Mary Jane Weldon. The bartender told the commissioner of the apparent shift in the plans of the crooks; that they declared a stick-up and switched to a kidnaping.

Wildcat's eyes narrowed to cold blue pin points. That there was something phony about the kidnaping he was certain. But he was also certain that such a conclusion might not lessen the danger to Mary Jane Weldon. Wildcat stepped quickly into a phone booth in the shadow of the dim entrance to the Club Sabina.

He dialed a number. Then he twisted the bulb in the ceiling of the booth and plunged the tiny cubicle into darkness. The voice that bellowed into the phone from the other end of the connection was a booming roar somewhat suggestive of an irate lion.

"This is Wildcat, Quick," the commissioner barked in response.

The booming voice lowered.

"O. K., Wildcat. I was afraid you were in trouble from reports I'd just gotten over the radio."

The speaker was retired Deputy Richard Traeger, better known to his friends as Quick Trigger. Old Quick had practically raised Wildcat Gordon. The elder man lived in a well-fitted penthouse peculiarly situated atop an abandoned warehouse on the Hudson River near the West Street docks. He was silent as Wildcat issued swift instructions.

"I will need to do some questioning in private," Wildcat said quickly. "I wish you would clear the decks and prepare a chamber for a visitor."

Quick Trigger's grunt again came over the wire.

"When'll he be around, Wildcat?" Quick requested.

There was a pause. Then the voice that came over the wire was different. A sibilant hiss drifted through the receiver. The words carried a haunting challenge. The tone had a quality that defied direction.

Inside the darkened booth, Wildcat Gordon had inserted an odd set of dental plates into his mouth. It made his blocklike chin long and pointed. His voice, hissing through those clenched teeth, was a whispering warning to crime.

As he spoke, the young commissioner placed contact-disk lenses against his eyeballs. The contact disks were green. Tiny sutures of invisible tape tugged at the corners of his eyes, slanted them in a weirdly Oriental manner. From a black leather brief case he carried came black clothing that hid the sartorial garb of Wildcat Gordon.

"He will be there within an hour, I believe," the eerie, husky voice whispered into the mouthpiece of the phone.

For Wildcat Gordon was The Whisperer! The relentless nemesis of crime was a mere disguise of the most feared commissioner of police New York had had in years. Years before, Wildcat Gordon's father had held that high executive office. Often he had mourned the fact that crime was often found in the strata high in politics; that the hands of an honest, fearless police commissioner were tied by the demands and desires of politicians.

The youthful Wildcat had listened to those plaints. When he had been elevated to commissionership, he had resolved that those ties would not bind his hands in battling crime. The Whisperer had been his answer.

The Whisperer husked final instructions to old Quick Trigger. For Quick, who had manufactured the strange dental plates that created the weird disguise, was the only man alive who knew the true identity of the mysterious foe who worked in the interest of true justice.

"A girl has been kidnaped," The Whisperer said. "If I find her, I may need to have her hidden for a while. See that Tiny is available if we need her."

There was a click on the wire as The Whisperer hung up and drifted almost invisibly into the night. Quick Trigger pronged the receiver in his penthouse apartment. There was a worried expression on the old man's face.

Quick Trigger was a tall, gaunt man with practically no hair at all. There were only two gray tufts above his ears that stuck out somewhat like horns. Quick squinted in nearsighted fashion. Many crooks had believed that appearance. Some of them had landed on cold slabs with bullet holes dead center in their foreheads.

Quick Trigger was *not* nearsighted.

The retired deputy rose from the phone and peered worriedly about the room. A diminutively pretty brunette was curled up on a huge divan reading a magazine. Her well-formed figure seemed lost in the great overstuffed cushions.

Tiny Traeger looked up and smiled at her father with large dark eyes. There was a question on her lips, but her eyes seemed to reveal the answer she sought.

Neither Quick nor Wildcat could ever be sure how much Tiny knew or suspected about the identity of The Whisperer. Tiny and Wildcat thought more of each other than either one would admit. But the young commissioner felt that his life was too dangerous to share with a woman, particularly one for whom he felt the affection he really did for Tiny.

The two bickered greatly. Tiny was always reminding Wildcat that the mysterious Whisperer was a better crime fighter than the commissioner, but there was often laughter in her eyes when she said it. Quick peered at her for a moment, then looked at his watch.

"There's a report on my desk at headquarters that I'd like to have you get," he rumbled. "And would you mind going up to Times Square to get me a copy of the Scranton *Blade?*"

Quick figured that those chores would take the girl well over an hour to perform.

Tiny sighed and put down her magazine. Officially, she only knew that she was sent out frequently when her father conferred with an underworld tipster named Dunk Smith, who was presumably a valuable contact in the war against crime.

Tiny went out, down the special

elevator to the street. Quick moved swiftly to a door that apparently led into an empty closet. He raised a secret trap and pressed a hidden light switch. A blue light seemed to leap into a long corridor beneath the penthouse floor. The passageway was lighted by a long fluorescent tube filled with calcium tungstate, yielding the brilliant blue illumination.

Quick Trigger lowered himself into it, then opened several doors. Here were secret chambers where The Whisperer could question suspects and hold criminals who would have been released by clever shyster lawyers if they were incarcerated in a police cell. Here, in the living tomb that was the lair of The Whisperer, a writ of habeas corpus was merely something one could talk about.

Satisfied that everything was ready, Quick ascended to the penthouse floor. A worried frown creased his brow. Sometime, Quick was certain, The Whisperer would not return from one of his sallies into the underworld.

CHAPTER V.

MURDER FOILED.

The black coupé was as inconspicuous as the wraithlike man who drove it. The Whisperer tooled his car up Riverside Drive and into districts that had once sported the homes of wealthy residents of upper Manhattan. He parked in a district occupied mainly by Latin Americans and transients. It was a section where police and narcotic agents often found reefer clubs, the smokers of the murder drug, marijuana.

The half-visible foe of crime hugged the gloom of old brownstone homes. He padded softly toward a poolroom where he knew petty thugs were wont to hang out between their forays into crime. It was the sort of place that was better to be left running than to close up by police action. As long as it was open, it offered a trail that often led to wanted crooks. Closed, that trail would be obliterated.

The Whisperer's clothing was rumpled and dusty as he sidled into the room. He kept his pointed chin buried in the collar of his coat. His eyelids slitted over the greenish disks so that his eyes showed no color at all. The Whisperer hoped he would be recognized as Dunk Smith, a petty crook who hung on the fringe of crime, a personage of no importance whatever.

But the foe of the underworld did not get his wish.

As he padded through the doorway into the smoke-filled room a body moved suddenly behind him. A sharp blade swiftly pricked the flesh between his ribs. Involuntarily the crime foe's eyes shot open and the baleful green pupils glowed from the slanted sockets.

Billiard cues clattered to the floor as a cry went up.

"It's The Whisperer! Get him!"

Blackjacks and automatics leaped into willing hands. Hoarse laughter crawled from ugly throats. The words told the black-clad battler that The Whisperer had been expected. Every stranger who had entered the poolroom in the last hour had been subjected to a sharp jab of that knife to force him to identify himself.

The mobbies growled like a pack of wolves as they converged upon the wraithlike fighter. Guns blasted and lead fanned the air. But The Whisperer kept moving. He did not retreat from the gunmen. He plunged his compact body into their midst. Gang guns blasted fellow

crooks. The killers tried to scatter so they might blast The Whisperer without bringing sudden death to their pals.

But The Whisperer's supersilenced pistols were in action, too. Blue flame spewed death to the mobbies. And as the crime foe weaved, dodging gangster slugs, his green eyes took in every aspect of the room. The wall was lined with mirrors between the cue racks. One of them caught The Whisperer's attention. It was of a slightly different cast than the rest.

An eerie, chuckling whisper issued from the crime foe's lips as he worked his way toward that. At first the mobbies did not sense his intention. An exultant cry went up from half a dozen throats. It seemed that The Whisperer was working his way to a spot where he would present a perfect target.

The mobbies held their fire, waiting for the perfect shot they were sure was almost at hand. Then there was a sudden crash of glass. A shout of rage went up from the mob.

The Whisperer plunged headfirst through the wall mirror that had showed a slightly different tint! The Whisperer had sensed that this was a mirror built to permit a one-way view from behind. That meant that it was a single sheet of glass blocking a passageway that might lead to freedom!

The killers yelled and boiled through the jagged aperture made by the hurtling body of The Whisperer. The crime foe was by no means in a spot of safety. The passageway behind the mirror led through a small room that was a virtual gangland arsenal. Two thugs were there, surrounded by bombs, Tommy-guns and ammunition. And behind The Whisperer, the mobbies raced in full cry like a pack of wolves.

But surprise came to the aid of The Whisperer. With a hissing challenge, the crime foe dived through the room. His supersilenced pistols pumped lead at the two guards there. Slugs nipped at their sides and shoulders. The chuckling whisper taunted them into sudden rage.

The thugs whirled with guns, began to blast. But the pursuing mobbies were in the room by then. The result was a carnage that none of the gangmen had anticipated. Complete confusion was the sole result. In that mêlée The Whisperer escaped to a dimly lighted street that led toward upper Broadway.

Halfway to Broadway there was a garish dance hall. And halfway to the dance hall The Whisperer literally collided with one of the two things he sought. The girl was running in the opposite direction, away from the dance hall. She fell, sobbing in terror when she recognized the mysterious black-clad figure. But there was a faint hope in her wide blue eyes.

No one was ever quite sure for which side of the law The Whisperer really worked.

"I am a friend," the eerie voice whispered to her. "Come. We must both escape."

Hesitantly, Jane Weldon permitted herself to be propelled through a cellar areaway that was the service entrance to a big apartment. Quickly they reached another street. The Whisperer slowed his pace and looked sharply at the girl under the dim glow of a street light. Jane Weldon's clothes were torn and grimy. Her face was scratched. Her eyes were terrified.

"Tell me all that happened," the

The mobsters growled like a bunch of wolves as they converged upon the wraithlike fighter. But The Whisperer's supersilenced pistols were in action, too.

soft voice said. "I must know if more lives are to be taken by this master criminal."

Jane Weldon hesitated. She looked unhappily at The Whisperer. It did not seem that she feared the

black-clad battler. But there seemed something else that would come but reluctantly from her lips.

"Th-they tied me in a room below that dance hall," Jane finally stammered. "I g-got away. B-but I heard them talking."

Jane Weldon's voice was low, as if a physical pain cut her with every word. She told that the gangsters had not tied her tightly enough, but that she had remained quiet so they would not notice it. They had left her in a darkened room that opened on a fire escape. Just before they went out of the room they had laughed harshly to themselves.

"Th-they said Roger Merrill would be sitting pretty if everything went off all right," Jane Weldon sobbed. "They talked as if he was one of them."

Tears of bitter anguish coursed down Mary Jane's pretty cheeks. It was obvious that she loved handsome Roger Merrill; that she hated to believe the things she had heard.

A soft chuckle of surprise came from the figure who hurried her along the dim street. The Whisperer paused when he reached his black coupé. He gently placed the girl in the roomy seat. One hand lightly flicked one bare arm. Jane Weldon drew it back. She thought a thumbnail had accidentally nicked her flesh.

Then she yawned.

"I'm so sleepy," she said in a strangely dreamy voice. "It seems awfully queer."

Then Jane yawned again and slumped back against the cushions. She slept.

The Whisperer chuckled. He locked the coupé door; the windows and windshield were bulletproof. Jane Weldon was safe, sleeping under the influence of the mild anæsthetic administered when The Whisperer flicked a tiny needle against her arm. She would awake shortly, refreshed.

The crime foe padded down the street. He wanted one quick look at the garish dance hall on the adjoining street. Then he wanted to question Jane Weldon further, when she was less hysterical and more recovered from the shock of her imprisonment.

The Whisperer used no disguise as he barged into the tawdry den of underworld pleasure. A supersilenced automatic was clenched in each compact fist. The Whisperer was ready to fight his way in and out of this hangout.

He sought only one face this time. He wanted to meet Knife Jorgan. If he could seize and question the kill-for-hire leader, so much the better. If he found him and could not seize him for questioning, Jorgan would not again direct a crime.

A whispering hiss of decision decided Jorgan's fate if he should now cross the path of the enemy of the underworld.

Music stopped as the green eyes of crime's foe stood motionless in the doorway. The challenging whisper of warning sent embraced couples recoiling from each other. Mobbies reached for guns. Then their hands hesitated, trembling; they reached toward the ceiling. With the drop on even a sizable mob, crime did not care to face those supersilenced weapons.

The Whisperer chuckled softly. He did not see Knife Jorgan. But across the room he did see the one known as Weasel, No. 1 henchman of the mob leader. The whispering chuckle rose with mirthless pleasure as the black-clad foeman padded softly across the room. The mobbies were like chickens, hynotized

by the beady eyes of a striking snake. Weasel cringed, tried to flatten himself through the wall itself.

But unexpected aid to crime came just as The Whisperer pocketed one gun and reached out to seize the skinny wrist of Weasel. The ratty gangster cried in fear as steely fingers clamped him tight. But in that instant the floor beneath The Whisperer fell away into a yawning pit of blackness.

The two figures plunged into the depths below. Swiftly, the floor swung upward into place. As it clicked shut, showing an apparently unbroken expanse of polished flooring, it snuffed out the final chuckling laugh of The Whisperer.

The chamber into which The Whisperer and Weasel dropped was about twenty feet square. It was lighted by one dim ceiling light. At three-foot intervals, about chest-high, there were small round holes.

Through one of those a black gun muzzle now protruded. Flame lanced from that.

Weasel screamed in pain. The Whisperer still held the small gunman in a grip of steel. A curse came from the other side of the wall. The killer outside that blockhouse of a room held his fire. Then he removed the gun and shifted to a place of vantage from which he might get The Whisperer without killing his own henchman.

The split seconds required to make that shift were all that the crime foe needed. Swiftly he struggled to his feet. He whipped an egg-shaped object from his pocket and slammed it to the floor. Thick, whitish smoke sifted up into the air. The egg-shaped thing was a police smoke bomb. The heavy fumes quickly filled the air, hid The Whisperer and his prisoner from searching eyes.

The cold muzzle of a supersilenced pistol pressed against the base of Weasel's skinny neck. Whispering words of doom hissed into the little gangster's ears.

"If you do not find a means of escape we will both die. But you shall be the first to go."

Weasel's skin was damp with clammy perspiration. A long shudder ran through his body. But the crook did know the layout of the gangster stronghold. He was, after all, the first lieutenant of Knife Jorgan.

Without a word, he stooped and clawed at a crack in the floor with his one good hand. The other hand dripped blood from the bullet that had caught him as he and The Whisperer had rolled on the floor. A wedge-shaped trapdoor yielded to Weasel's clawing grasp. Gingerly, the mobbie crept down a flight of stairs. The Whisperer's steely grip still held him by one shoulder. The crime foe paused to reclose the trap.

Then he flicked on his pencil flashlight. A long, rough corridor spread out before them, rambled under the big apartment houses that surrounded the garish dance hall. Chuckling softly, The Whisperer shoved his captive on ahead of him.

They emerged two blocks away. The street was deserted. The black-clad fighter looked quickly at his watch. Time was becoming an important item. The mild anæsthetic which he had administered to Mary Jane Weldon had not been intended to last very long. The encounter in the pit below the dance floor had delayed him.

With a chuckling exclamation of concern, he prodded Weasel along the street toward the parked black coupé. When they reached the car, one door was swung open. Jane Weldon was gone!

The Whisperer quickly slipped handcuffs over the wrists of Weasel. A quick emergency bandage stopped the bleeding of the gunshot wound. He leaped into the drab black coupé and whipped downtown toward the West Side water front. There was no conversation on the trip to Quick Trigger's apartment.

The wraithlike foe of crime was wrapped in thought. He wondered about the remarks Jane Weldon said she had overheard in the gangster hangout. The Whisperer wondered if those remarks had been carefully planted, if the girl had been deliberately tied so loosely that she could escape to repeat words that would cast suspicion on Roger Merrill.

If her escape had been planned with the idea of splitting her vote from Merrill, it didn't seem to make sense. Belknap Gall could prevent acceptance of Genung Rhodman's offer by the deadlock he could create with his own block of stock at present.

Before The Whisperer could reach any answers to those baffling questions there were other things he must know. He must know who had hired the crooks working for Knife Jorgan; he must find out what real goal lay beneath the surface in the operations of Electrical Industries, Inc., and Chrome Specialties Corp.

With a soft chuckle, the crime foe leaned toward his prisoner. Once more his hand flicked out with the tiny anæsthetic needle. Weasel gave a start. Then he began to snore gently. As he did, The Whisperer swung down off the elevated highway onto the street below. When criminals were brought to the secret chambers beneath Quick Trigger's penthouse, they were always robbed of consciousness.

None knew, when he returned from those weird rooms, where he had been. He could only tell in an awed voice of the experiences he had undergone somewhere in Manhattan.

The Whisperer braked the coupé outside of the lower elevator entrance to Quick Trigger's quarters. The only means of ingress from the street to the vaultlike prison inside the shabby warehouse was through Quick's apartment. The Whisperer hauled the limp form of Weasel into the elevator. The cage whined upward and jerked to a stop. Quick opened the door, helped The Whisperer through the big living room to the fake closet that hid the trap to the chamber below.

The bluish fluorescent light still glowed in the long corridor. The Whisperer turned off that hallway into a room shaped like a huge, squat melon. The walls were painted a shiny white. In the center was a large rough chair. There were straps on the arms and straps on the legs. What looked like an electrode was suspended above the straight back.

The device was modeled closely after the electric chair in the death house at Sing Sing.

But there was no searing amperage connected to this chair. Its effect was entirely psychological. And into it, Weasel was quickly strapped. His eyes began to flicker as consciousness returned. Quick Trigger swiftly absented himself from the room. It was not wise for the skinny crook to recognize the identity of The Whisperer's assistant.

As Weasel opened his eyes, a weird and horrifying fluorescence began to glow in the white walls. With eye-stunning brilliance, a dazzling green glare pressed down upon his frightened brain. The walls

were a mass of close-packed mercury-vapor lamps, coated inside with zinc silicate to yield the weird greenness that seared the eyeballs. The form of the room defied definition of shape or distance and gave Weasel the horrible impression that the blazing walls were slowly crowding down upon him.

He screamed in terror. He tried to shut his eyes, but complete fascination forced him to open them again. Cold sweat beaded on his face and neck.

The eerie chuckle of The Whisperer brought fresh terror to the Weasel.

"Tell me all about Knife Jorgan and the man who has hired him to commit these crimes," the mysterious figure demanded.

There was silence for a moment then as Weasel fought for control, then words tumbled from his foam-flecked lips. The Whisperer had used truth serum many times in questioning criminals. Its efficiency rating was considered high. But it had its limitations. Scopolamine combinations paralyzed the resistance of the brain and induced victims to answer direct questions put to them. But that was all.

The green terror of this inquisition chamber sent crooks searching their minds for information that would satisfy their captors. They begged to be freed from impending disaster beyond their mind's comprehension.

Saliva dribbled from Weasel's thin-lipped mouth. He admitted that he worked for Knife Jorgan, that he had followed Jorgan's orders in the capture of The Whisperer and the kidnaping of Mary Jane Weldon. But he denied that he knew what he was to do until Knife gave orders on the scene of the crimes.

"I don't know who's behind the thing," Weasel moaned. "I don't know what it's all about. M-maybe Knife doesn't even know."

Weasel's tongue protruded from his lips. His eyes were like small onions bulging from their sockets. And his terror was no simulation. Weasel was telling the truth.

A husky whisper of surprise escaped The Whisperer's lips. He flicked a switch, and slowly the terrifying green fluorescence faded from the walls and they became white again. Weasel was tightly lashed to the chair. He could not escape.

The Whisperer padded out of the door, locked it behind him. Then he joined Quick Trigger in the penthouse above. A phone was buzzing

as the crime foe entered the room. Quick moved quickly toward it. The buzzer that sounded now was an automatic relay from headquarters that contacted the penthouse if neither Quick nor Wildcat Gordon was available.

Quick Trigger snapped up the receiver. No voice answered his gruff "Hello." A roaring crash came over the wires. Then there was a scream of fear. A voice snarled threateningly. A frenzied plea for aid welled up then in a thin, shrill scream.

"Help! Help! They're killing me. They'll cook me alive, just like Ki—"

The receiver clicked and there was silence. A whispering chuckle made Quick Trigger turn. Green eyes glittered at him.

"Belknap Gall," The Whisperer said. "That was his voice, without question."

The Whisperer began to move swiftly, husking orders to Quick Trigger as he did. He told Quick to take a squad of cops with him and get to the laboratory of Electrical Industries as rapidly as he could.

Then the crime foe drifted out of the building, glided to his parked coupé below. Police would soon arrive at the midtown laboratory. But The Whisperer had other work to do.

CHAPTER VI.

MORDAT'S THEFT.

The Whisperer tooled his coupé through the night. He was thinking of the possible alliance of Roger Merrill and Genung Rhodman. He reasoned that any crime plans that might exist between those two should culminate at the experimental plant of Chrome Specialties Corp. It was to that plant that The Whisperer drove his coupé. Barbed-wire fences guarded a huge cinder-packed yard around the squat building that was Rhodman's metallurgical plant. A watchman drowsed in a chair under a single light bulb at the entrance.

The Whisperer began to move toward the watchman. Then he halted. Another vague figure darted furtively along the high wire fence. An eerie chuckle drifted from the lips of the crime foe. He could not see the outline of that body. But the peculiar, bobbing gait of the man told him that it was Ring Mordat, a director of Chrome Specialties.

The squirrel of a man suddenly raised his arms. He pulled one elbow back, as if he were aiming a crossbow—or a sling shot. There was a faint snap of rubber. Then glass crashed in a window of the squat building in the center of the yard.

The drowsing watchman's feet slammed down as if he had been jabbed with a pin. Without even glancing at the street, the man pounded toward the window that had shattered. Ring Mordat laughed tinnily. Apparently he had been sure of that reaction. He bounded through the now-unguarded gate into the darkness of the yard.

Not many yards behind him the half-visible figure of The Whisperer padded silently. Any crime that Ring Mordat might commit would not go unnoticed by the nemesis of the underworld.

Mordat bobbed swiftly to a rear door of the metallurgical plant and opened it with a key he carried. The door swung shut behind him. But there was no click of the lock. Outside, The Whisperer held that knob just short of locking position. He gave Mordat a few seconds to reach his destination. Then the ghostlike figure slipped into the darkened laboratory.

Mordat worked at an ancient safe in a large office off the central hall. He used a tiny flashlight that he cupped with one hand. His tinny laugh sounded as the tumblers fell into place; then the safe door swung open. Quick hands seized a sheet of paper covered with a mass of figures. Mordat's whining voice repeated some of them to himself. "Eighteen-eight, chrome and nickel," he mumbled, "plus manganese and vanadium."

The squirrel of a man could scarcely contain his mirth. He fairly shook with laughter as he turned toward the door to the hallway. The Whisperer flattened quickly against the wall in the darkened corridor. In a moment he would seize the crooked associate of Genung Rhodman and question him.

That was the plan of The Whisperer. But other forces intervened. The watchman had grown worried about the strange breaking of a window in the plant. He was silently patrolling the halls and corridors of the building, searching for a marauder.

The Whisperer struck as Ring Mordat bobbed through the door from the office. But the watchman struck in the same instant. The guard could not tell friend from foe in the dark. Had there been light, he undoubtedly would have made a wrong decision. He would have known Ring Mordat as a director in the concern. The Whisperer would have been the logical suspect.

The watchman carried a blackjack. He sledged down mightily with that. The leather-covered sack of shot slammed against the skull of The Whisperer. The crime foe fell against the watchman, seized the sledging wrist with one steely wrist. The night guard slugged back, fighting valiantly.

The Whisperer ripped the blackjack from his grasp and twisted free. But in the meantime, Ring Mordat had escaped. The dim figure of The Whisperer raced out of the building in pursuit. But Mordat had disappeared. Mordat had a formula which he was scheduled to hand over to Belknap Gall.

But whether the crooked stockholder would do that or not was questionable. If Mordat would double-cross his own associates, there was little chance that he would remain on the level with Belknap Gall if he should discover that his interests lay elsewhere.

The Whisperer slid back into his black coupé and tooled it the dozen blocks to the laboratory of Electrical Industries, Inc. Police cars were just drawing up in the dim street before the big building. The Whisperer left his coupé and made his way across the outer yard to a vantage point on the other side of the huge room that served as laboratory and directors' room. A chuckling whisper drifted into the air as he surveyed the scene within the great room.

The skinny form of Belknap Gall was lashed tightly across the electrode feeders of a huge electric furnace! A heavy scent of ozone filled the air about the laboratory. Gall's shrill voice screamed directions.

And in front of Gall weaved the white-haired, dissipated figure of Titus Vanderlee III. With fumbling fingers, the playboy tried to unfasten the knots that bound the president of Electrical Industries. They seemed to elude him completely. Then Titus yanked on one loose end and managed to free the knot.

In that instant Quick Trigger,

JAMES "WILDCAT" GORDON

● Wildcat Gordon, New York's youngest police commissioner, is known for his hard-hitting, unorthodox methods for solving crime. As The Whisperer, there are no rules, no interfering politicians to decree how a case is to be solved and slow the swift path of justice.

Bolton, and a squad of cops opened the door and strode into the room. Gall, his hands free, untied the knots that held his ankles. He wavered uncertainly, nearly fell against old Quick. Then he began to pound gnarled knuckles against the retired deputy.

"It's time you got here," he shrilled. "Time you got around to saving an old man from being murdered. This young man freed me, thank goodness. Even if he is drunk, he's better than the police in this city."

Titus Vanderlee grinned owlishly at Gall's words. It was probably the first time in years that anyone had said he was good for anything. Quick Trigger snorted.

"What happened?"

Gall kept pounding with his knuckles, switching from Quick's chest to the round directors' table.

"Gangsters!" he squealed. "A dozen of them. They tied me to a furnace, running ten thousand volts, and pulled the switch."

Quick's brow wrinkled into a frown.

"But—"

Titus laughed in an hysterical falsetto, pointed at another electric crucible. The wiring on that one was a charred mass of dust.

"They pulled the wrong switch," Gall shrilled, "and blew out the other furnace. But they missed me."

Titus Vanderlee weaved drunkenly toward the other furnace and poked an uncertain finger at it. Belknap Gall shrilled a warning.

"Get away, you fool. There's still enough current there to burn you to a crisp."

Titus staggered back.

"Shfunny," he mumbled. "Ish . . . *hic* . . . don't look dansherous."

Quick whirled on the playboy.

"What were *you* doing here?" the gaunt deputy rumbled.

Titus staggered back on rubbery legs. He put one finger against the side of his nose. His expression was coy.

"Sh-h-h," he whispered. "Shomeshing you shouldn't know."

Bolton squealed in horror as Quick leaped forward and took Titus by the scruff of the neck. The Vanderlee fortune had once been great, and

the social and political standing of the name still were great enough to make Henry bob his head in greeting.

"What were you doing here?" Quick roared again. He shook Titus as if he were a wayward puppy. The action seemed to shake some of the alcohol out of Titus' brain. He stood erect and stopped weaving.

"I came to tell Gall . . . *hic* . . . I wouldn't shteal Rhodman's formula for him," Titus said distinctly.

Henry Bolton almost swallowed a cigarette he was lighting. His little eyes darted wonderingly from Belknap Gall to the young playboy. Bolton was suddenly wishing he had stayed at headquarters. This was not the type of situation he relished.

Belknap Gall stopped pounding his knuckles against the table. A sheepish expression crossed his face.

"It is true in a sense," he admitted. "I didn't want him to exactly steal the formula. But I wanted to know what was in it, merely to prevent Rhodman from swindling me under the terms of a contract for the delivery of sufficient power and equipment to make the formula work. I'd be committing myself to produce something I couldn't be sure I had."

One of Quick Trigger's eyebrows went up. The old deputy was skeptical.

"Shtruth," Titus Vanderlee interjected. "I know enough to go along with that."

Henry Bolton's gaze was wandering by that time. It rested suddenly on the window behind which The Whisperer was witnessing the odd scene. Henry's eyes popped. Then he rubbed them with the back of his hand. For a moment he had thought he saw something. Then he changed his mind.

For The Whisperer had retreated from his vantage point. He had heard the conversation. The window had been open a trifle. He whispered in concentration. Belknap Gall's explanations did sound logical.

It was almost a certainty that Genung Rhodman would be able to gain control of Electrical Industries with Gall out of the way. But there was something in that tableau that did not square with The Whisperer's conclusions. He recalled every detail of the actions and conversations of Belknap Gall and the weaving Titus Vanderlee.

Then The Whisperer straightened and darted swiftly back into the deeper shadow of the building. A furtive figure moved near the corner. Slowly and silently it moved toward the window that The Whisperer had just vacated.

An instant later the squirrellike form of Ring Mordat was silhouetted in the window. Mordat laughed tinnily and drifted back in the obscurity of the darkness. Presently The Whisperer heard the scraping sound of a jimmy forcing up a window. The direction told him it was the window to the private office of Belknap Gall, the one in which he had found the still-baffling equation, SI9000:225.

Swiftly The Whisperer followed Mordat to that window. Mordat was bobbing about in the small office. He used the same guarded flashlight he had used in the offices of Chrome Specialties Corp. Mordat riffled through the filing cabinet, but apparently found nothing that interested him.

Then his flashlight fell upon the wastebasket. A whine of excitement came from him then. He bobbed down over the basket, examined the figures that The Whisperer had seen.

There was triumph in Mordat's laugh.

As had The Whisperer, Ring Mordat carefully replaced the torn slip where he had found it. Then his head bobbed erect. Belknap Gall's shrill voice was bidding the cops good-by. The voice was nearing the inner door to the office.

With a whining sneer, Ring Mordat leaped to the window. The Whisperer flattened into the darkness, determined to follow Mordat.

The eerie whisper sounded faintly, no more than a breath of the night wind sighing around the corners of the building. Ring Mordat didn't even turn his head. He bounded out into the narrow street that ran along the rear of Electrical Industries' property.

As he passed under a street light, the mobsters jumped him. Ring Mordat screamed in terror. The gravel-in-a-pan voice of Knife Jorgan laughed harshly. As Mordat fell to the cobblestones, Jorgan kicked him in contempt. He slugged the squirrellike man and ripped the stolen formula from his pocket.

With a whispering cry of challenge, The Whisperer sprang forward. He had little thought of the welfare of Ring Mordat. But crime had other plans, he was certain; plans that must be stopped to save human lives.

A narrow wire stretched across a passageway to the street tripped The Whisperer. The crime foe fell. And as he did, sinister hands sledged out of the blackness. The heavy butt of an automatic smashed against his skull. The Whisperer rolled, whipped out his supersilenced guns. Blue flame lanced up. A mobbie screamed, lost his head; the booming roar of his gun barked in answer. Knife Jorgan cursed.

"The cops, you fool," he rasped. "That'll bring 'em sure."

And Knife Jorgan's summary was correct. Cops departing from the laboratory heard that shot. They boiled around the corner just as Knife Jorgan's men vanished over a high fence that separated the property from the East River. A motorboat roared to life and the mobsters were gone. The cops didn't get any of them.

But they did find the slumped form of Ring Mordat. And they found The Whisperer!

Two burly cops leaped upon the mysterious scrapper as he struggled to his feet. The Whisperer's brain was still reeling from the impact of that gun butt. Full strength was not his to command. By the time Henry Bolton stormed up, stout handcuffs encircled both his wrists and ankles.

The Whisperer was trapped this time, surrounded by an entire squad of cops. Bolton gloated.

"This is one time you won't get away," he sneered. "You'll sweat plenty in the old River Precinct."

But crime was to come to the aid of The Whisperer in a stroke more ghastly than had yet been struck!

CHAPTER VII.

MOLTEN BARS.

Ring Mordat sat up uncertainly and rubbed a fast-growing lump on his skull. Then his shifty eyes darted to the squad of cops. One hand quickly slipped into the pocket where he had carried the stolen formula.

Fear immediately crossed his features. Suddenly he lost what little nerve he had. Ring Mordat obviously didn't know who was friend or foe. He pointed one wavering hand at Belknap Gall.

"H-he hired me to do it!" Mordat whined. "L-leave me alone."

Then he noted the expressions of amazement on the faces of the cops and realized that panic had trapped him into admitting that he had committed a crime. His mouth snapped shut and a crafty look came into his eyes.

"What am I talking about?" he mumbled. "I must have been hit on the head."

Bolton looked expectantly at the gaunt figure of Belknap Gall. Henry expected a prompt denial. But Bolton was mistaken. Either Belknap Gall was playing a cagily smart game or he was disgusted with the double-crossing Ring Mordat.

"I didn't hire the rat!" Gall yelled. "He volunteered to get Rhodman's formula for me. Maybe he has it with him. You ought to find out. I want no part of him."

Mordat cringed. But defiance crept into his eyes. He knew that a search of his person would reveal no formula. And he didn't know who had that formula.

"He lies," Mordat whined. "Search me."

Henry Bolton searched Mordat with no result. The squirrel of a man began to move away. He was halfway to the next street when Slug Minor pounded up to the group surrounding The Whisperer.

"Where's Mordat?" Slug grunted. "I got a warrant for his arrest."

Quick Trigger rumbled in surprise. Without another word he plunged up the street, collared the retreating Ring Mordat. The little man bobbed up and down in a struggle to get free. But he subsided when Slug Minor confronted him.

"Genung Rhodman has sworn out a warrant for your arrest," Slug told him. "You dropped your wallet when you stole his formula."

Mordat gasped, reached for his hip pocket. Then he shrugged.

"You've got me," he said tinnily. "But I know enough about some people to get protection."

Mordat stared at Belknap Gall. His shifty eyes sneered in some immunity he seemed to feel. Gall rapped the knuckles of one hand into the palm of the other. His words were a shrill crescendo.

"The man is mad," he screamed. "Just because he thinks I hired him to get that formula he feels that he has something he can squeeze me with."

Slug Minor turned on Gall. Slug didn't like the skinny industrialist, anyway. Slug usually picked on people who were bigger than he was, physically or politically.

"I think you're behind the whole business," Slug rumbled. "Before we're through we'll be locking you up in a cage."

"Hold your tongue, you truck-driving mug," Bolton screamed. "I'll have you put out on Staten Island. Why, this man has just survived an attempt to murder him!"

"Probably subterfuge," Slug grunted.

Bolton opened his mouth.

"Nuts!" Slug grunted. "He's probably covering something up."

Belknap Gall started to object. But a huge form materialized through the gloom. Black-maned Genung Rhodman stalked into the circle. His black eyes snapped with a strange contempt. The thick lips curled into a sneer as he noticed Ring Mordat.

"You are clumsy, Mordat," Rhodman said. "You are also a fool."

Something in Rhodman's tone demanded attention; his personality carried a strange power in conversation. No word was spoken until he continued.

"I thought someone would try to steal that formula," Rhodman went on, "so I planted a phony in that ancient safe. It isn't worth a nickel!"

The eerie whisper that drifted from the lips of the manacled man in black brought Henry Bolton back to life.

"Take them both to the River Precinct," Henry snapped. He nodded at Mordat and The Whisperer. "I'll sweat them plenty."

The Whisperer chuckled again in sardonic mirth as he was dragged into a waiting squad car. He was thinking of the triumph of Knife Jordan and his gang.

The Whisperer was trying to fathom the equation, SI9000:225, as he was tossed into one of the ancient cells of the old River Station. He was trying to tie two smart men with that equation, for he knew that both Genung Rhodman and Belknap Gall were men of shrewd intellect.

He also wanted to know what had happened to pretty Mary Jane Weldon. The girl had freed herself, then had embarked on some investigation of her own that was undoubtedly fraught with danger.

The Whisperer looked about the dim, steel-barred cell block of the jail. The cell block was of an old-fashioned type. He could see Ring Mordat across the narrow corridor. Mordat had not lost his sneering unconcern. There was something in his defiance that did not fit into the picture.

The Whisperer chuckled softly to himself. One compact hand lifted up the tubular metal leg of the wire-mattressed cot on which he sat. Handcuffs had been removed when he was thrown into the cell. Inside the leg of each cot in River Precinct was a key that would open the cell door. A master key that The Whisperer carried unlocked the secret compartment of each leg. The foe of crime had long since reasoned that Bolton would take him to this little-known station for questioning if he were captured. Once before the precaution of those keys had freed The Whisperer.

The nemesis of the underworld found the key. But he did not use it. Strange events transpired then in the jail that had stood dingy and drab through a quarter of a century.

A low whine rose into the air. At first it was but a vague, indefinite sound, as if some nocturnal insect were flying through the air. Then the whining noise rose to a swiftly mounting crescendo. The scent of ozone filled the air.

Ring Mordat let out a sudden yell of terror. The Whisperer leaped to his feet, peered at the squirrellike man in the other cell. Sweat poured from the nose and chin of Ring Mordat. There was utter horror mirrored in his eyes. Mordat's face worked like a weird plastic mask.

"No! No! Don't do it!" he cried. "Stop the thing. I'll do anything you say!"

Ring Mordat was on his knees. Knuckles whitened as he clenched the bars of his cell. Sanity left his eyes in the sweeping panic that seized his brain.

A chuckling whisper of amazement welled from the lips of the black-clad fighter as he watched Ring Mordat. The Whisperer did not know what was coming. But he could guess the type of horror that was about to descend upon the sleepy old station. The Whisperer rocked on the rubber heels he wore. He stood as nearly in the exact center of the cell as he could.

Then it came.

The welling scream of terror from Ring Mordat died in a horrid gurgle.

He sobbed once, then was silent. The smell of ozone was complemented by a heavy stench of burning flesh. The bars of the cell in which Mordat knelt began to glow red. Then they were white. Burned flesh dropped from the hands that still gripped the bars!

The terrible force spread to the other cells of the old building. Their bars were interconnecting. The steel rods of the cell in which The Whisperer was confined glowed with an intense white heat. Then the case-hardened steel began to melt—began to run like so many sticks of heated butter!

The crescendo of the humming whine had no discernible direction. It rose to a screaming roar. Then it snapped off as if cut with a knife. A deathly silence filled the cell block. The crumpled form of Ring Mordat lay huddled, smoldering against the bars of the cell in which he had been locked!

Molten metal had run down to the stone floor in tiny pyramids.

TINY TRAEGER

● Tiny is the dark-haired, pert daughter of old Quick Trigger. A diminutive bundle of loveliness, she nurses a secret devotion for Wildcat Gordon.

CHAPTER VIII.

MESSAGE OF PERIL.

Crime had struck to seal the lips of a petty crook who had tried to double-cross the man with whom he worked. Ring Mordat's lips were sealed forever.

In the opposite cell, the huddled form of The Whisperer lay prostrate upon the stone floor. Voices buzzed in the squad room beyond the cell block. The nasal twang of Henry Bolton cut the air.

"Open up the door. The Whisperer is in there. He may be escaping."

Henry Bolton did not reach for the knob to the door that led into the cell block of old River Precinct. Henry let the nonrated men do that. The omnipresent scent of ozone was overpowering in the antique jail. It carried a subtle threat of some terrifying force that was beyond understanding.

The cops opened the door to the cell block and Henry crowded in behind them. He saw the huddled form of the man who had stolen for Belknap Gall. He also saw the slumped body of The Whisperer in the cell across the narrow corridor.

Steel heats quickly. It cools at a similarly rapid rate. The cell bars were still too hot to touch. But it was not necessary to touch the doors to open them. Like girders twisted

in the heat of a terrific fire, the doors were weirdly ajar. Iron bars were twisted like grotesque fingers of death.

The flesh of Ring Mordat fell away as the policemen moved toward his cell. Henry Bolton entered the cell in which the body of The Whisperer lay huddled.

An eerie, hissing challenge met Bolton's first scrutiny. The black-clad battler rose with a rush. The heat had been in the cell bars alone. Ring Mordat had been grasping the bars that carried the terrifically high amperage. The Whisperer had retreated to a point in the center of his cell. His black clothing smoldered from reflected heat. But he was still fully conscious.

He met Henry Bolton in a rush. The long-nosed deputy was no match for the steel muscles of The Whisperer. The crime foe slugged out roughly. It was not usual for The Whisperer to inflict pain or damage to a policeman. But The Whisperer knew now that more murder must be halted.

He knew, from the strange appearance of this terrific current at a point remote from Belknap Gall's power plant, that something far deeper than control of that plant—or even of Rhodman's formula—lay behind the baffling path of crime! What it was he did not know. But he did know that unless he found it, innocent lives would be taken.

Henry Bolton slumped to the floor. Quickly the Whisperer dived from the cell. He raced down the passageway and into the squad room of the old station. Two figures blocked his way there. Quick Trigger was one of them. The other was burly Slug Minor.

Slug let out a roar and plunged at the hurtling body of The Whisperer. Slug had encountered the black-clad fighter before and had often wondered whether The Whisperer was really an enemy of the law or not. But it was not his province to decide such things. This was a prisoner escaping. Slug plunged in to stop him.

Quick Trigger grunted and rushed in to help the brawny police chauffeur. But apparently the old man stumbled. He didn't catch The Whisperer. But he did fall against Slug's treelike legs. Slug let out a growl at the peculiar interference. But his hands missed The Whisperer.

The enigmatic figure got away, raced off into the night. Slug grumbled at his own clumsiness. If it occurred to him that Quick had purposefully tripped him, the burly chauffeur gave no intimation.

A chuckling whisper drifted back to the station house. The dim figure raced in the direction of the Hudson River. The Whisperer had decided that Wildcat Gordon must appear on the scene of spreading crime. Many official questions must be asked that only the man who had been The Whisperer could know.

Belatedly, one thing had occurred to him. The equation, SI9000:225, had been running through his mind. Part of it had suggested itself to him as a possible direction to a solution. SI is the official abbreviated designation of Staten Island, located in the smallest of the five boroughs of New York City. In fact, the borough of Richmond consists only of Staten Island. And on Staten Island, The Whisperer recalled, Electrical Industries, Inc., maintained the experimental laboratory where the more dangerous developments in electrodynamics were conducted.

The whispering chuckle drifted through the air as the wraithlike battler sped toward the West Side wa-

ter front. The Whisperer was a long way from his parked coupé. His immediate destination was a phone booth, where he could transform himself into Wildcat Gordon. Then he intended to make a quick stop at the penthouse atop the antiquated warehouse near the Hudson River docks.

Other events were also shaping up which would draw The Whisperer to the Staten Island laboratory. Some of them were transpiring in the personal office of Belknap Gall in the big laboratory building of Electrical Industries, Inc.

A tiny flash showed in that office. For the third time that night a furtive marauder found the tiny torn slip of paper bearing the equation that had baffled The Whisperer. A voice gasped as the tiny flash found the slip where it had been replaced in the wastebasket.

The voice was richly feminine. Then the flash tipped up, showing the pretty face of Jane Weldon in its reflection.

"I see it now," the girl breathed to herself. "The thing is bigger than any of us are supposed to know!"

Jane stood erect. Her jaw firmed with a sudden determination; her blue eyes flashed with anger.

"It's a frame-up," she decided. "I know now what to do."

A voice behind Jane grated from the darkness of the room.

"Perhaps you know, but you won't be around to do it."

Jane Weldon flinched. She whirled around. Then she wilted. A man crowded through the door. He was masked, and in the gloom his figure was but dimly outlined. He held a knife in one hand.

Jane Weldon was a spunky girl, but she knew the odds that were against her. Jane sagged, turned her head away. She shrank, letting the man come barging through the door. A knife swung up above the girl's unprotected back.

Then her high French heels came down sharply. They pounded into the soft leather of the knife wielder's instep. A husky cry of pain came from the man with the knife. Then suddenly the girl was out of the room. She raced down the street, frantically searching for some haven where she might find a phone.

The doors of the Club Sabina were dark. The nearest phone was in a diner, half a block beyond. The girl rushed into that. Jane stepped quickly into a corner phone booth and dialed the operator.

"Police headquarters," she gasped. "Commissioner Wildcat Gordon. Quick! This is important."

The operator went swiftly into action.

The Whisperer found a phone booth of his own in a dingy cigar store on West Street. It was run by a nondescript man named Winky Withers. Winky had once been forced to fence cigarettes for a bunch of racketeers. Winky hadn't wanted to be a fence. But the gang had told him that he would be a good one or he would find a permanent home at the bottom of the Hudson River with a concrete block cast around his feet.

A black-clad man with slanted green eyes had come to his aid. The man with the greenish eyes had settled with the thugs who were crowding Winky. And Winky Withers had been allowed to go back to selling cigars and cigarettes in his accustomed manner.

Winky might have had some idea that The Whisperer was a mere disguise for someone else. But he

didn't want to know anything like that. He would have merely blinked his watery eyes and said he never saw The Whisperer if he had been questioned about the matter.

The Whisperer plunged into a phone booth in Winky's now. The cigar dealer immediately retired to a rear room, where he proceeded to pick up a newspaper and begin perusing a column he had already finished an hour ago. He did not emerge until he heard the front door close again. When he came out, the store was empty. All that Winky knew was that The Whisperer had gone. More than that he did not wish to know.

Wildcat Gordon reached the penthouse of old Quick Trigger a scant few minutes before the phone rang. Tiny Traeger was curled up on the divan, reading, when Wildcat came in. The girl's dark eyes surveyed him closely.

"I thought you'd be with dad," she said. "He seemed to have a lot on his mind tonight." Then she noticed that Wildcat was worried. Her voice changed to a tone of deep concern. "What can I do, Wildcat? Let me help with something for a change."

It was always a great annoyance to Tiny Traeger that neither Wildcat nor her father would let her participate in the crime hunts that occupied the major part of their time.

Wildcat Gordon hesitated. The harsh lines on the jaw of the commissioner softened for a moment.

Then the phone rang.

Wildcat leaped to the instrument. It was the one that handled relayed calls from headquarters when neither he nor Quick Trigger was present. Wildcat whipped up the receiver and identified himself. The voice that came over the wire was that of Jane Weldon. She was almost hysterical.

"I've found it," the blond girl gasped. "It's on S-Staten Island. It's—"

A scream of terror welled from the receiver in Wildcat's hand. Jane's voice died in a choked sob.

Staccato shots sounded over the phone. Then there was silence. A sharp click broke the connection. Sweat broke out on Wildcat Gordon's forehead. He jiggled the receiver post of the phone, got the operator and demanded that the call be traced. But it had been made from a dial phone; there was no possible way of tracing it.

Wildcat cradled the receiver, his lips a tight, grim line.

"A girl," he said to Tiny. "A girl who doesn't have any business playing in crime. She's probably going to pay a high price for trying it."

Then the muted bell of the phone buzzed again. The voice on the other end of the wire spluttered incoherent words for a moment.

"J-Jane's been kidnaped," the sotted tones of Titus Vanderlee informed Wildcat. "I-I'm on the trail. I'll call you back."

Titus Vanderlee hung up the phone.

Wildcat Gordon turned grimly from the desk.

"It appears that more murder is about to happen," he said. "I've got to find out where it is going to be."

Tiny Traeger's dark eyes flashed defiantly.

"I'm going with you, Wildcat," she said in her low contralto. "I might be able to help. That girl is in trouble."

Wildcat was momentarily indecisive. Tiny had often been of conderable assistance where girls had been involved in crimes. The young commissioner tried to contact Quick

Trigger through headquarters on the other phone. While he was thus engaged, the relay phone bell buzzed again. Wildcat scooped it up. The guttural voice of Titus Vanderlee came over it again.

"I-I've got them trapped," the scion of society said. "I gotta have police reserves to get the mob. They've got Jane prisoner in a tenement near the fish markets."

Vanderlee gave an address which Wildcat jotted down on a memo pad. Wildcat snapped erect and turned to Tiny.

"You stay here, Tiny," he rapped. "This is a mobster job, and you might get hurt."

Tiny Traeger didn't argue. She knew it would not avail her. But Quick Trigger was not left in the penthouse to keep an eye on his diminutive daughter. When Wildcat had left the building, Tiny walked quickly to the pad on the phone table.

Wildcat had used a hard lead pencil. The address he had written was plainly discernible on the sheet underneath the one he had torn off. Tiny smiled slightly as she rubbed the side of a soft lead pencil over it.

Then she swung a light cape over her shoulders and walked quickly out of the penthouse. The fast elevator took her to the street level, where she hailed a cab and gave directions.

CHAPTER IX.

THE MOBSTERS CONQUER.

Titus Vanderlee III hung affectionately to a lamp-post in a remote corner of the fish-market district. The white-haired playboy grinned foolishly at the dark doorway through which he had seen the kidnapers carry Jane Weldon. Titus had just come from a phone booth in a grimy drugstore on the corner.

A drunken smile of triumph wreathed his lips. An idea suddenly seemed to occur to him, as an idea will to a drunk.

"Hell whish 'em," Titus burbled. "Titush big enough."

Titus let go of his only visible means of support and weaved toward the door. He negotiated the steps in a system of two up and one back. But finally he got to the dark portal. He pounded on it with a flabby fist.

"Open ish thing," he yelled in a maudlin voice. "You got my girl in there."

The door snapped open and an ugly head appeared. A hamlike fist shot out, toppled Titus Vanderlee into the street.

"On your way, drunk," a voice rasped.

Titus stumbled backward and landed sitting down on the sidewalk. He didn't seem disturbed about the thing. Apparently he had been thrown out of better places than this one. He set a course for the lamp-post and resumed hanging onto it for support. He was in that position when Wildcat Gordon leaped from a cab.

Wildcat didn't waste many words. He demanded to know where the girl had been taken. Titus kept one hand on the lamp-post to steady himself and pointed toward the door from which he had just been ejected.

Wildcat loosed a pair of Police Positives from shoulder holsters and stalked up the steps. Titus wavered in his wake like a dinghy astern a sailboat in a heavy sea. The door, peculiarly, was unlocked.

Titus seemed to get a hold on himself as the two men strode into the tawdry entrance hall. A realization

of danger apparently brought him out of his semistupor. Titus had no brace of revolvers. But he scooped up a piece of wood that lay in the unswept hall. It formed a rough sort of bludgeon.

Titus was holding that at arm's length when the mobbies swept down into the hallway. Wildcat's two guns began belching flame and lead. Their roar was deafening in the narrow confines of the crude corridor. Wildcat fired point-blank at the rushing bodies.

Then the gunmen were upon him in a human avalanche. Blackjacks whizzed through the air, slashed against his skull. Slowly, Wildcat Gordon sank to the floor. His brain whirled with vague shapes. Only one thing was clear to him, and that for but a moment. The door of the old tenement opened. Through it ran Tiny Traeger, her dark eyes ablaze, a tiny automatic in her small hand.

A scarred thug laughed raucously, smashed the gun to the floor. In another second, Tiny was also a prisoner. Then a bludgeon smashed again against Wildcat's skull and the lights went out for him.

Wildcat's two guns belched flame and lead at the avalanche of bodies that swept down into the narrow hallway.

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Titus was holding that at arm's length when the mobbies swept down into the hallway. Wildcat's two guns began belching flame and lead. Their roar was deafening in the narrow confines of the crude corridor. Wildcat fired point-blank at the rushing bodies.

Then the gunmen were upon him in a human avalanche. Blackjacks whizzed through the air, slashed against his skull. Slowly, Wildcat Gordon sank to the floor. His brain whirled with vague shapes. Only one thing was clear to him, and that for but a moment. The door of the old tenement opened. Through it ran Tiny Traeger, her dark eyes ablaze, a tiny automatic in her small hand.

A scarred thug laughed raucously, smashed the gun to the floor. In another second, Tiny was also a prisoner. Then a bludgeon smashed again against Wildcat's skull and the lights went out for him.

Wildcat's two guns belched flame and lead at the avalanche of bodies that swept down into the narrow hallway.

Wildcat Gordon regained consciousness in a dimly lighted room that smelled of fish and gasoline. The floor was slippery with grease and water. Beneath him he could hear the *lap-lap* of the East River against the piles of some old fish dock. Harsh voices snarled contemptuously.

Wildcat sat erect and looked around him. He expected to see Knife Jorgan or other members of Knife's gang. What he did see brought a gasp from his lips.

The boss of this mob leaned over his bound body and kicked him in the ribs. The man had a head as flat on top as a dinner plate. The skull tapered from that weird-looking plateau down to a weak, receding chin. It gave him an appearance of near-idiocy.

He was known as Flathead Winston. And far from being an idiot, he was known as a ruthless schemer to whom life meant little or nothing. But the thing that brought the gasp of surprise from Wildcat was the fact that Flathead Winston was one of the deadliest enemies in the underworld to Knife Jorgan!

The tangled paths of crime grew more complex. The young commissioner had not yet been able to satisfy himself as to who was hiring Knife Jorgan. And now the appearance of Flathead Winston scrambled things even more. If the same master criminal were employing both Knife and Flathead, he was courting a mutiny that might well wreck all his plans.

But Wildcat did not believe that such was the case. He rolled from another kick delivered by Flathead and surveyed the rest of the prisoners. Tiny Traeger and Jane Weldon were both bound and gagged. Tiny's large eyes were rueful as she returned Wildcat's glance. She knew she had violated all the instructions of Wildcat and her father in walking into this trap. If she hadn't rushed in with a futile idea that she could help, she might have gotten word to old Quick and really done some good.

Wildcat did not berate her. Censure would serve no purpose now. He looked beyond the two girls at the huddled form of Titus Vanderlee. The scion of Park Avenue was obviously unconscious. An ugly red gash showed on his skull; blood oozed from the wound.

Flathead Winston laughed raucously, left Wildcat and prodded Vanderlee with one foot.

"These amachoors ain't got no business in this racket," Flathead snarled. His voice was thick, as if some impediment were in his mouth. His small eyes twinkled then and he looked at Wildcat.

"You ain't much better, either, wise guy," he grunted.

Then he turned to his henchmen who lounged around the shed.

"O. K., fellas. Let's get goin'."

Like actors in a well-rehearsed play, the thugs carried out their duties. One of them lifted a trapdoor in the grimy floor. It gave way to a rough chute that led toward the water below. One of the crooks slid down it and landed on some sort of platform underneath the dock. Then the prisoners were shoved into the hole one by one. The girls went first; then Wildcat and Vanderlee.

Beside a narrow platform there was a boat that looked like a small trawler. It had a stub of a mast cut off, so the boat could get under the high stringers of the dock. The prisoners were spread out on the deck and covered with a greasy tarpaulin. The kidnapers kept up a running fire of conversation as they

cast off the ropes and headed into the river.

"Head for Rosebank," Flathead ordered thickly. "We got a small dock there."

Rosebank is a small community on Staten Island near the upper end of the Narrows that separates the island from Brooklyn.

"We'll plant these babies where it'll look like Gall done the job," Flathead went on. "Then the big boss'll be able to take over his outfit, all right."

A skinny thug jerked a thumb at the tarpaulin covering the prisoners.

"Ain'tcha scared to let them birds hear?" he queried.

Flathead laughed thickly.

"Naw!" he grunted. "They get theirs before we get to the island. We just take the stiffs ashore."

Wildcat Gordon's eyes narrowed as he listened to the conversation. If he could credit the conversation of the mobsters, the master mind behind this thing had to be Genung Rhodman instead of Belknap Gall.

But somehow that didn't quite make sense to Wildcat. He was sure there was some important point that he had missed.

CHAPTER X.

THE WRITING ON THE WALL.

Henry Bolton had missed something, too. But Henry knew what it was. The long-nosed deputy screamed threateningly at Quick Trigger and Slug. Henry conveniently forgot that he had lost a bout with The Whisperer in the cell block.

It was much easier to blame Quick and Slug for letting him get away.

"The chance of a lifetime and you fools muffed it," Henry whined. "Now Wildcat'll have the laugh again."

Then Henry got an idea.

"I bet The Whisperer is the guy behind this," he complained. "If he is, he'll probably go back to Rhodman's to try to get the real formula."

Quick Trigger was not in a position to tell Henry that The Whisperer would not do that. So he went along with Henry and Slug to the plant of Chrome Specialties Corp. Quick believed a fast check of the plant would show no marauders and that they could then return to headquarters.

But Quick Trigger was wrong.

Gunfire blatted out just as the three were climbing from a police coupé in the dark street outside the wire fence of Chrome Specialties Corp. Glass crashed in a window of the main building. The watchman left his post on a dead run as Quick, Slug and Henry pounded up. He saw the three police officials and yelled back to them over his shoulder.

"Mr. Rhodman's in there!" he shouted. "Someone's trying to kill him!"

The four men raced into the main entrance to the building. As they did there was a second crash of glass, and a heavy body hurtled to the cindered yard in front. Quick whirled out of the building again. He heard only the sound of running feet. Quick raced after the fugitive, but the grounds were dark and the man could run. He got away.

Quick went back inside. In the big office that held the ancient safe that Ring Mordat had rifled earlier, Genung Rhodman lay on the floor. There was a black-and-blue lump on his jaw. Slowly, Rhodman struggled to his feet. There was pain in his black, snapping eyes; pain and something more. He waved one hand toward a picture that hung

askew on one wall. From behind a corner of it peeped the shiny polished steel of a modern safe. The door was ajar.

"The formula! The real one!" Rhodman blurted. "H-he got it!"

Bolton's fishlike mouth gulped.

"Who got what?" Henry asked rather stupidly. There was only one answer that Bolton expected. But his little eyes popped at the one he got.

"He slugged me from behind," Rhodman snapped. "I didn't see him. But he was a pretty tall man. I'll bet on Belknap Gall."

Slug Minor glared at Bolton.

"I told you that guy was poison," Slug grunted.

Bolton looked uncomfortable. He ran one finger around inside his collar, tried to find words to defend the man he considered of political importance. Rhodman interrupted him.

"That's right," he growled. "And Ring Mordat is working with him."

Quick Trigger raised one eyebrow.

"Was," he snorted. "Mordat is dead."

Then Quick told Genung Rhodman what had happened at the old River Precinct. Rhodman's thick lips parted in surprise. Sweat broke out on his forehead. His black eyes took on an expression of incredulity.

"B-but the station's a mile and a half from Gall's power plant," he blurted. "The thing isn't possible."

Quick rumbled that, impossible or not, it had happened. He scratched his bald dome and peered intently at Genung Rhodman.

"You sure you told us all you know?" Quick demanded.

Rhodman's agate eyes glinted suddenly. His thick lips compressed grimly. An expression of harsh determination spread over Rhodman's face.

"No," he spat out, "I haven't! And I'm not going to—right now."

Slug Minor moved toward Genung Rhodman like an angered gorilla. Slug's hands, seemingly as big as fielder's mitts, reached out for the industrialist.

"You'll tell us," the burly chauffeur rumbled. "There's been enough killing going on to make me use some pressure."

Genung Rhodman laughed shortly. He shook his leonine mane of black hair and lunged. Slug missed him, and Rhodman found the light switch. The room was plunged into darkness and Rhodman pounded down the corridor. The three cops tore after him. But Rhodman raced down the steps, headed toward a small private dock at the edge of the river. A motor racketed then and Rhodman was gone. Quick and Bolton both knew that Genung Rhodman commuted daily to his home on Long Island in that speedboat.

Slug Minor panted up in the rear.

"W-what's it all about?" he demanded. "I can't make head or tail out of this thing."

Quick scratched his bald dome again.

"Looks to me like it was something bigger than Rhodman had suspected," he grumbled. "He looked to me like he'd just figured out something himself."

Quick peered at Henry.

"You can go wherever you want to, Henry, but I'm going to pay another visit to Belknap Gall."

Henry Bolton winced. He knew suspicion was swinging around to Gall. And Henry didn't like it. But he didn't quite have the face to refuse to go along with Quick.

The three men climbed back into

the police car. Slug drove down Second Avenue underneath the elevated. Quick instructed him to stop at a drugstore. The old deputy wanted to contact Wildcat, tell him what had happened at Chrome Specialties Corp.

Quick dialed the private number at headquarters which immediately relayed to the penthouse if neither he nor Wildcat answered it. Quick was not surprised that Wildcat was not at police headquarters. But when the penthouse did not answer, a worried frown creased the gaunt deputy's brow. He knew that whether Wildcat was there or not, Tiny Traeger should have answered.

Something, Quick knew then, was very wrong. Growling with increasing anger, he climbed back into the police car. Few words were spoken in traversing the few remaining blocks to the laboratory of Belknap Gall.

Quick Trigger rang the signal bell at the main door. There wasn't any answer, so Quick walked in.

Belknap Gall was not present. No one was in the building. But someone had been there not long before that. The private office of Gall was a complete shambles!

The filing cabinet lay on the floor; its contents littered the entire room. Chairs rested in crazy positions, the legs on two of them broken, as if they had been used as weapons. An inkwell had overturned on Gall's big desk, and blue fluid smeared the top.

Suddenly Bolton let out a yell. Ink was smeared over one section of the wall. At first the scrawlings looked like meaningless hieroglyphics. Then it could be seen that scrawled characters were there—upside down!

Written with a forefinger dipped in spilled ink, upside down, as a man might write with his hands tied behind him, were the words:

Kidnap S. I. kill me help G.

Bolton whined nasally.

"I told you Gall was the victim in this thing. We'd better get to him quickly."

Quick Trigger snorted.

"Where?"

Slug Minor, who reads everything he can get his hands on, supplied the answer.

"Staten Island," he rumbled. "Gall has a laboratory there. It's in Howland Hook, on the flats near Kill van Kull."

Quick moved swiftly. He almost ran into a tall figure hurtling through the door. It was dark-haired, handsome Roger Merrill, the third stockholder of Electrical Industries, Inc. Merrill was panting.

"I . . . I got a phone call from Jane!" he blurted. "She told me to come down here at once. Where is she?"

Quick's eyes narrowed. He knew nothing of the whereabouts of Jane Weldon. And Quick was getting suspicious of everybody.

"You're the one guy who was opposing Belknap Gall," he rumbled. "And he's been kidnaped. I think we'll take you along with us."

Quick nodded to Slug Minor. The burly police chauffeur strode over to Roger and slid handcuffs on his wrists. Quick and Bolton climbed into the police coupé. Slug followed in a cab with his prisoner.

"We'll go to Staten Island," Quick rumbled. "If this thing is going to break at all, it'll be over there."

On the way downtown to the harbor precinct at the Battery, Quick Trigger stopped twice to attempt to contact his penthouse. The gaunt deputy was plenty worried when

they boarded the sixty-foot patrol boat and headed for St. George, Staten Island. It was not like Tiny to absent herself from the penthouse without leaving word for him. Quick only hoped she was with Wildcat Gordon.

But not under the circumstances in which she was accompanying the young commissioner.

CHAPTER XI.

DEATH IN THE HARBOR.

The greasy tarpaulin that covered the prisoners on the dingy boat served a double purpose. One of them was to the advantage of the mobbies. A casual scrutiny by any passing police boat would not reveal the presence of their victims. The cops wouldn't be able to see them. But neither could the killers watch what Wildcat Gordon was doing.

Beneath the canvas cover, Wildcat struggled with his bonds. A brass cleat was screwed into the deck under Wildcat. The cleat was uncomfortable to lean against, but it was very handy to hook the ropes under and pull until they stretched. They did stretch, and Wildcat got his hands free. He doubled then and untied the ropes at his ankles.

That movement rumpled the sheet of canvas. Flathead Winston grumbled thickly; he stooped down to see what was going on under there. Wildcat sprang as Flathead leaned over. Gordon's skull smashed against the kidnaper's jaw. Flathead stumbled, waving his arms in windmill fashion.

He made a one-point landing sitting down and yelled as he stumbled backward. His henchmen poured out of the stuffy cabin of the trawler, swinging blackjacks. One yanked a heavy pump handle loose and flailed with it at Wildcat's head. The bludgeon grazed the skull of the commissioner, sent him reeling.

Wildcat stumbled. But as he did, he grappled with the thug. The two men wavered in the gloom, lunged toward the rail. The thug's ugly voice spat curses into the night. Suddenly the two dim forms separated at the rail. The bludgeon smashed out. There was a dull cry of pain and a splash as the bludgeoned fighter tumbled into the chill water of the bay.

"One less damn cop to bother us," the victor's voice grated harshly. "It's time someone got rid of that nosy guy."

Flathead Winston's thick voice laughed.

"Nice work, Curly," he clucked. "I'll give you a raise in pay."

A harsh laugh answered him, and the dim form of the victor drifted up the deck. A choked cry came from Tiny Traeger from beneath the tarpaulin. The girl had chewed her gag partly loose. She sobbed faintly. But as she did, a whispering challenge to crime came from the top of the trawler's cabin.

The Whisperer was aboard crime's boat!

Wildcat Gordon had wrested the bludgeon from the thug named Curly and had covered his victory by imitating the killer's voice. When Wildcat had left the phone booth in Winky Withers' cigar store, he had worn his own bright clothing over the drab attire of The Whisperer.

The mobbies had taken Wildcat's brace of Police .38s when they had nabbed him. But they had missed The Whisperer's supersilenced pistols strapped to the calves of his legs.

The supersilenced guns spoke now. Blue flame lanced out. Flat-

Straight for the three bobbing heads the trawler roared.

head Winston cursed in pain and clapped one hand to his shoulder; blood spurted from a bullet wound. The rest of the mobbies boiled out on deck. Gang guns spoke with authority. Lead tugged at the coat sleeves of The Whisperer.

The ghostlike nemesis of crime leaped from the cabin top. There were twelve gunmen against him now. The boat was small; it offered little space in which to maneuver. And another problem beset The Whisperer. Gang bullets might find the helpless forms of the two girls tied beneath the tarpaulin.

His guns spat flame and lead, forcing the killers to duck for cover. In a split second of quiet, The Whisperer leaned over the tarpaulin. A tiny blade gleamed in his hand. He slashed the bonds that held the two girls.

Then a fusillade burst from the cabin door. Lead burned across The Whisperer's check. Other guns poked out around the two corners of the cabin.

They were hurling death from three vantage points; more than The Whisperer in such confined quarters could cover at one time. The husky voice of the crime foe cut into the night.

"Jump!" he ordered. "It's your only chance."

Lead whined around the black-clad battler's head. He had no opportunity to free the other huddled figure beneath the canvas. The gangsters were converging. The Whisperer staggered to the rail of the trawler. He seemed weary, strangely heavy on his feet. There was a tremendous splash as he followed the two girls over the side into the bay.

Three bobbing heads dropped behind in the wake of the boat. Two swimmers seemed to be trying to hold up the third. The swimmer who needed help was The Whisperer!

On the boat, Flathead Winston laughed harshly. He held a pair of night glasses to his eyes with his one good hand.

"Turn around," he rasped. "Go right over them. The propeller will cut them to bits."

Flathead chuckled at his plan. The helmsman turned the trawler about sharply. The motor stepped up into a roar of power. It was no fisherman's motor, but a powerful speed job designed to outdistance either police or coast guard if the mob should get into trouble.

The helmsman knew how to handle his clumsy-looking craft. Straight for the three struggling heads the trawler roared. The snub prow of the craft hurled white spray into a huge V. Then the boat was upon the three bobbing swimmers. Tiny Traeger screamed!

The two girls and The Whisperer sank from sight as the heavy trawler rushed over them. The big wheel churned with thumping strokes. Flathead Winston looked intently astern with his powerful binoculars. Then he chuckled harshly, dropped the glasses to slap his thigh in mirth.

The three bobbing heads were no longer to be seen struggling in the bay!

It is well known that sounds carry with great clarity under water. And it was fortunate that the trawler was doing well over twenty miles an hour as she pounded off toward Staten Island.

When more than a minute had elapsed, The Whisperer's trained ears told him that Flathead Winston and his murderous crew were well out of sight. He released the cast-

iron anchor he held with fast-stiffening fingers, and the three figures shot to the surface.

The Whisperer had encountered great difficulty in keeping afloat while holding the anchor with which he had leaped from the trawler. The two girls had helped him with all their strength.

He had figured that Flathead Winston would engineer some murderous trick like running over them with his high-speed propeller. So when the bow of the boat reared above their heads, the black-clad battler had simply stopped struggling. The girls went limp as he instructed; they had clung tightly to him.

The weight of the cast-iron anchor had done the rest. The beating propeller meant for death passed harmlessly above their heads!

Fortunately, both Tiny Traeger and Jane Weldon were accomplished swimmers. With The Whisperer they set out with long strokes toward the nearest part of the Staten Island shore. The murder boat had been near the upper end of the Narrows when The Whisperer had told them to jump. They were not far from the docks at Stapleton.

The nearest piers happened to be the free-port docks where cargoes are transshipped from one foreign country to the boats of another without payment of duty. Those docks are closely guarded by photoelectric cells to prevent smugglers from removing cargoes stored there and bringing them into the country.

As the three swimmers crossed the line between the outer ends of the pier they intercepted the invisible infrared beam. A siren immediately began to wail. Guards rushed out from the watchman's shack. The Whisperer swam toward them with powerful strokes, yelling for life preservers for the two tiring girls.

His attempt to help Tiny and Jane Weldon unwittingly permitted Flathead Winston to spring a trap. For the gang boss had not gone on to his destination at Rosebank, farther down toward the Narrows.

As the guards disappeared into the shack to bring out life preservers, Winston's trawler roared suddenly in from the night. Apparently Flathead had been uncertain of the death of The Whisperer and his other erstwhile prisoners. The siren alarm on the dock had told him where they had swum to.

The Whisperer whirled in the water and tried to bring one supersilenced pistol into line. But the gang boat moved too swiftly. Thugs with boathooks crowded in the bow. They

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tangled the hooks in the clothing of the girls, hauled them aboard.

Then the helmsman swung the craft out into the bay. Flathead's thick voice rumbled triumphantly.

"Good thing the boss told us to go back and check up on 'em," he blurted. "These short-wave radios are swell items."

Flathead said other things. But their import was lost in the wind. The two guards were shooting with rifles by that time. They had seen the kidnaping right inside the waters of the pier. In their efforts to wing the helmsman of the trawler, they forgot The Whisperer. The enemy of crime swam to the opposite dock, climbed silently to the concrete surface. Instantly he blended with the night and drifted up toward the drab saloons of Stapleton's water front.

In the first one he came to, The Whisperer found a phone booth. He removed the queer dental plates as he spoke. He called the St. George police headquarters, control precinct of the island. He used the brisk tones of Wildcat Gordon.

"Deputies Traeger and Bolton are here, commissioner," the desk lieutenant informed him.

Wildcat asked to talk to Quick. He wondered why he and Bolton had come to Staten Island. Quick told him; he detailed the conversation with Rhodman and the kidnap message scrawled in ink upside down on the wall of the office of Belknap Gall.

"They must have gotten Gall this time," Quick rumbled.

Wildcat's tongue was against his teeth. He whistled softly.

"I wonder," Wildcat said softly. "There is one thing I haven't had a chance to tell you. When Belknap Gall was apparently the victim of a murder attempt early in the night, I am sure he faked it."

Quick grunted in amazement.

"A friend of mine watched Vanderlee jerk the ropes free," Wildcat told Quick significantly. "One jerk freed the bonds at his wrists. They had been self-tied!"

Wildcat cut off Quick Trigger's demand for further explanation. He issued brisk instructions. He told Quick to take Slug and Bolton to Rosebank immediately; told him Tiny, Jane and Vanderlee were aboard. He gave Quick the registration number of the trawler and a description of the boat.

"When you get through at Rosebank, come to the laboratory of Electrical Industries at Howland Hook," Wildcat snapped. "I'm on my way there now."

The Whisperer replaced his dental plates and drifted toward the Stapleton police precinct. Near that station, Wildcat Gordon had hidden extra clothing for both himself and The Whisperer for emergency use on Staten Island.

He donned fresh clothing that befitted Wildcat Gordon and strode into the station. There was one fast squad car attached to the precinct. Wildcat commandeered that and set out for the dreary section of Howland Hook.

As he raced along past Silver Lake to Forest Avenue and ultimately to Richmond Terrace, Wildcat tried to fit wild, uneven pieces of the murder puzzle together.

If Belknap Gall were really the brain behind these murders and the strange goal that had made them necessary, he might well have engineered the kidnaping of Jane Weldon just to throw suspicion on Genung Rhodman.

But one thing did not seem to fit

into any theory. Two mob leaders who hated each other were both involved in this affair. Knife Jorgan had kidnaped Jane Weldon. But Flathead Winston and his gang had clearly indicated that they were working for Genung Rhodman.

And then there was Rhodman's queer refusal to manufacture the product of his formula in any plant he could not completely control. There was something in that that defied Wildcat's analysis.

Of one thing Wildcat was certain. The key to this maze, whatever it was, lay in the Howland Hook laboratories of Belknap Gall. The equation The Whisperer had been unable to fathom and the centering of crime's activities on Staten Island assured him of that. And he thought that when he got there now he would find some of the answers.

Wildcat turned off Richmond Terrace toward the flats that front Newark Bay, near the mouth of Kill van Kull. The area is a dreary one, vast expanses of wasteland with occasional industrial establishments. The experimental laboratory of Electrical Industries, Inc., was the most isolated man-made improvement in the area.

Segregated from other structures of brick and stone, the laboratory had been placed so that dangerous experiments could be conducted there without endangering other property. Two roads led into it from Richmond Terrace, one of which Wildcat now traveled. He was half a mile from the gaunt building when the first sparks began to shower from the windows.

Wildcat jammed the accelerator of the police car to the floorboards. A high, whining hum pressed on his eardrums like a droning song of death. The showering sparks increased in volume. The whole building became a solid pyrotechnical display.

Then, silhouetted against the brilliance, Wildcat saw another automobile racing along the second road that led to Richmond Terrace. At the same time, the whining hum began to decrease. The glow within the building faded.

Wildcat could not cut across the flats to pursue the other car. The narrow road he was on went only to the laboratory. He jammed on the brakes when he reached there, tore from the police coupé. A smell of scorching flesh replaced the scent of ozone. Wildcat cursed softly to himself.

Crime had struck again, he knew. Murder had followed murder.

He stamped into the main room of the laboratory. Stretched on the floor was the body of Belknap Gall. The hands of the skinny industrialist were burned to carbon talons. Belknap Gall was cooked, just as Kirk Mannersly had been; as Ring Mordat had been murdered in the old River Precinct cell.

But the most amazing angle was the absence of any electrical equipment that seemed powerful enough to do anything like that! The laboratory was completely barren except for a few dozen retorts and test tubes!

CHAPTER XII.

DEATH CAR.

Wildcat was not alone long with his thoughts. Two powerful cars roared up the road to the laboratory. Quick Trigger tumbled from the first one, followed by Slug Minor and Bolton. The second car carried a squad of uniformed cops. Wildcat met them outside.

Quick's eyes were haggard under his bushy brows.

"Tiny, Wildcat," he gulped. "We

can't find any trace of her, nor of the other girl, either."

Wildcat's blue eyes went cold and hard.

"Did you find the boat?"

Quick Trigger nodded.

"Not a soul on board. She was tied up at Rosebank."

Wildcat looked at the squad of cops approaching from the second machine.

"What did you do with Roger Merrill?" Wildcat inquired.

Quick Trigger looked crestfallen.

"He got out a window at St. George headquarters," he admitted. "Handcuffs and all."

Wildcat turned suddenly.

"Exactly what time?"

"While I was talking to you on the phone," Quick Trigger told him.

Wildcat was silent for a moment.

"He could have had time to get here, at that," Wildcat said slowly. He turned, led the way into the laboratory.

Henry Bolton's long nose quivered when he saw the corpse of skinny Belknap Gall. He jumped up and down in self-vindication.

"I told you," he whined at Slug Minor. "I told you that Gall was a victim. If you'd believed me, we might have saved his life."

Henry didn't have any idea how that might have been accomplished, but it sounded to him like the right thing to say. Slug glared at him.

Quick Trigger wanted to know what Wildcat had meant by saying Roger Merrill might have had time. The young commissioner pointed out that, leaving St. George before he had left Stapleton, Merrill could have preceded him to the laboratory by a good fifteen minutes.

Quick was about to agree when a shout went up from one of the uniformed cops. They had been instructed to examine every inch of the building. Apparently they had.

Two of them fought their way in, dragging a struggling figure behind them. It was Genung Rhodman!

The broad-shouldered metallurgist straightened when he saw Wildcat Gordon. Some of the snap came back into his black eyes. But there still seemed to be fear in his expression —unless he was putting on a good act. Wildcat's expression gave no indication of what he thought about Rhodman. His voice was flat, without inflection.

"How did you get there?" he asked.

Rhodman said he had come over from Manhattan in his speedboat, thinking he would find Gall here. His own automobile had been parked at St. George. He insisted that he had wanted a showdown with Gall. Slug Minor glanced at the corpse as Rhodman talked.

"Looks like Gall had a showdown with someone," he observed.

Genung Rhodman shuddered.

"It . . . it was horrible," he moaned.

Wildcat's expression did not change.

"Just exactly what was horrible?"

Rhodman said the laboratory had been vacant when he had arrived. Shortly after he had arrived there, the metallurgist insisted, he heard another car approach. Then he hid in the coal bin in which the two cops had just discovered him. After what had happened, he had been too frightened to come out.

Quick Trigger thought that Rhodman did not look like a man who was easily frightened. He said so.

"Easily frightened!" Rhodman yelled. "What went on would frighten anybody. Two people got out of the other car and came into the laboratory. Right away a terrible humming started, like a monstrous spark gap. Then Gall began

to scream. I could smell ozone. And I could smell cooking flesh. It . . . it was awful."

Wildcat still stared at Rhodman.

"None the less, we will have to hold you as a material witness to murder," he said flatly.

Rhodman started to protest. But a commotion at the door interrupted him. A new arrival was forcing his way into the laboratory over the violent objection of two policemen.

The newcomer was handsome, dark-haired Roger Merrill!

The handcuffs were still on Roger Merrill's wrists. But somehow he had managed to part the chain links that joined them. The young man's hair was disheveled, his eyes wide and staring. Henry Bolton leaped toward him, seized him by one arm.

"Where have you been since you escaped from St. George?" he yelled nasally. "I think you came out here and murdered Belknap Gall."

Roger Merrill seemed not to hear the long-nosed deputy. He twisted free, strode up to Wildcat.

"Jane—" he gasped. "Jane is gone. W-where is she?"

Wildcat answered him briskly.

"Jane Weldon has been kidnaped," he snapped. "And Belknap Gall has been murdered. What do you know about it?"

Apparently Roger Merrill saw the corpse of Gall for the first time. He recoiled as if someone had slapped him.

"W-w-what happened?" he said.

"Murdered!" Wildcat told him. "Murdered by some device in this laboratory. What was being developed here?"

Either Roger Merrill didn't know anything or he could have had a career on the stage. The wild light went out of his eyes and he spoke evenly.

RICHARD TRAEGER

● Retired Deputy Traeger, known as old Quick Trigger, is Wildcat Gordon's most trusted friend. He, alone, knows the secret of The Whisperer, for it was old Quick who aided Wildcat in devising the ghostlike figure of the underworld who is the foe of crime.

"Nothing of any importance. The place was scarcely used at all."

Wildcat strode quickly to one wall. His quick eyes had noticed one thing that had escaped the others. Square marks edged by dust showed where heavy objects, apparently in the shape of packing cases, had recently been moved.

"What was stored here?" Wildcat demanded.

Merrill shook his head.

"I haven't any idea," he denied. "I haven't been over here for months."

Bolton snarled words of disbelief. Quick Trigger and Slug Minor were both looking at Roger Merrill. The other cops were prowling about the place. The concentration on Roger gave Genung Rhodman an opportunity to sneak out of the door. His car was parked not many feet from the entrance.

Suddenly he made a dash for it.

"I've got an idea," he bellowed. "And I'm going to do something about it!"

Before anybody could stop him, Rhodman raced to his car, gunned his motor into life. The car roared out of the driveway and down one of the roads to Richmond Terrace.

"Stop him!" Merrill yelled. "He's the man behind this thing!"

Wildcat didn't move. He swung back to Merrill.

"He is not the man who murdered Belknap Gall," Wildcat said evenly. "The man who did that left here in a high-powered car just before I arrived. Rhodman was still on the grounds."

Bolton resumed his accusations.

"Gall's murder makes you and Jane Weldon the controlling stockholders of Electrical Industries, Inc.," he reminded. "What have you got to say about that?"

Wildcat forestalled an answer. He looked at his watch, then held up a hand.

"I have motorcycle men posted on Richmond Terrace," he said. "They should have picked up Rhodman's trail by now. We will follow."

One patrolman was left to guard the body of Belknap Gall. The others got back in their squad car. Bolton, Quick and Slug rode in the machine in which they had come. Wildcat took Roger Merrill in with him. All were instructed to keep their radios in operation.

Wildcat tooled his car out onto Richmond Terrace. Reports began coming in on the police wave length from the motorcycle-side-car unit that had been instructed to follow any car that left the Howland Hook laboratory. The fleeing car of Rhodman went over Richmond Terrace and south on Richmond Avenue toward Victory Boulevard.

Reports came in satisfactorily every half mile or so. Then the fugitive machine suddenly cut off the main road. The reporting motorcycle lost track of it. Rhodman had almost reached Victory Boulevard. Another peculiar report came in.

Apparently the police were not the only pursuers of the metallurgist! A fast black limousine had cut in ahead of the motorcycle and had vanished with Rhodman's car!

A whistle of surprise escaped Wildcat's lips.

"More murder on the way, I'm afraid," he snapped. "I'm afraid the boys won't pick up that trail again."

But the commissioner was wrong. A moment later the motorcycle sergeant reported in again. The car had turned into a well-known lane. As instructed, the motorcycle unit did not follow. The lane was dead end. So the pursuing cop pulled up to the roadside to await the arrival of Wildcat Gordon.

Wildcat cursed softly. He turned on the transmitter of his radio and tried to contact the motorcycle sergeant. He wanted to tell the man to go on in, to seize Rhodman immediately. But Wildcat didn't get an opportunity. The sergeant still had his transmitter going, furnishing more details of Rhodman's car and the one that had been pursuing it.

By the time Wildcat managed to

contact the motorcycle, his car was nearly at the scene. He told the cop to go into the lane immediately. Then Wildcat said a peculiar thing.

"Don't kill Rhodman," he snapped. "Your job is to protect him from being killed!"

For Wildcat Gordon had come to some definite conclusions back in the experimental laboratory of Electrical Industries, Inc. They were conclusions that made him reluctant to force the hand of the master killer until he was sure he could control the situation.

Wildcat was thinking not only of justice. He was thinking of the lives of two girls who were now in the hands of the master murderer.

Wildcat's fast coupé reached the secluded lane off Victory Boulevard almost as soon as the motorcycle men began closing in on the favorite parking spot. As he leaped from his car, guns began to blast from the field.

Excited screams welled up from other cars. Couples leaped to the ground and began to run. Wildcat snapped orders to withhold fire until innocent bystanders had a chance to get to safety. Then the cops began closing in with vengeance.

Gangster guns talked death. Red jabs of flame ripped out. But the cops were many, and their aim was good.

The grating voice of Knife Jorgan grated through the air.

"Scram!" Knife rasped. "Take Rhodman's car. Ours has a flat."

A police Tommy-gun chattered death to the gangsters. But half a dozen members of the mob could be seen scrambling through the gloom to one parked car. One reached out and gripped the handle of a door.

Instantly there was a crackling of electricity, a shower of sparks that lighted up the field. A high, whining hum mounted into the air. Then the big sedan was outlined in a mass of scorching flame!

Gangsters screamed in pain and terror. The stench of burning flesh drifted heavily into the air. Dying groans and shrieks of horror welled from gangster throats. The half-dry grass of the big field caught fire, adding a ghostly touch to the scene.

Then the whining hum cut off with amazing suddenness. The ensuing silence seemed suddenly oppressive. Moans of agony came from dim figures writhing on the ground. The flaming sedan receded to a cherry-red. Then it was a charred, smoking black.

Police flashlights flicked on. A floodlight from the squad car produced a sickly pale illumination. Dying gangsters were scattered about the field. Knife Jorgan tried to scramble to his feet. He didn't have the strength to make it. He fell back weakly, his face contorted with pain.

Wildcat strode quickly to Jorgan and leaned over the dying gangster.

"You're going out, Knife," Wildcat said softly. "If you're going to talk, you'd better do it now."

Knife's scarred features twisted into a grimace of hate. His words were weak, came with a mighty effort.

"Double-crossed," Knife gasped. "That rat, Gall, double-crossed us!"

Wildcat propped the gangster up, asked soft questions. Knife Jorgan made a tremendous effort. His words were low. But they were many before his eyes rolled up in his head, the final curtain in a killer's life.

Knife said that Belknap Gall had hired him. For just what reason he did not know. He said he had been given a signal to kidnap Jane Wel-

don in the Club Sabina. Then they had been instructed to let the girl escape after having her overhear their conversation implicating Roger Merrill. Later, Knife said, the mob was instructed to keep tabs on Genung Rhodman at all times. They were doing that when the car burst into flames and cooked half of his gang to death.

Knife's head wabbled on his neck. His killer eyes surveyed Wildcat. But they weren't killer eyes any more. They were the frightened eyes of a man who knew he was dying.

"I . . . I ain't much fer preachers," Knife said weakly. "B-but that's the truth that I just told you."

Then Knife Jorgan died.

Wildcat straightened to meet the nasal protests of Henry Bolton. Henry's defense of Gall was still going strong. Wildcat Gordon reminded Henry that the statement of a dying man is acceptable evidence, even in some courtrooms.

Wildcat paused.

"Belknap Gall secretly developed some terrific power source," he decided. "But something backfired on him. There is more to this thing than the cupidity of Belknap Gall!"

Henry shuddered. He was remembering how the skinny industrialist looked stretched out on the floor of his laboratory.

Wildcat strode to the car that had recently been a living mass of flame. It was Genung Rhodman's car. But there was no corpse in the machine. The car was entirely empty.

If the death trap had been planned to dispose of Genung Rhodman, it had failed. But Wildcat Gordon did not think that such was the case. The death trap, he felt certain, had been left for either police or The Whisperer!

Knife Jorgan and his gang were operating on the previously given instructions of a dead man when they stumbled into death. A counterplot of crime had turned murder on competing rats of the underworld!

CHAPTER XIII.

THREE LIVES THREATENED.

Wildcat Gordon turned Roger Merrill over to Quick Trigger. He instructed Quick, Bolton and Slug to return to St. George headquarters and await further instructions. Two patrolmen were left to wait for the medical examiner to examine the dead gunmen.

Wildcat's car was the last to leave. The young commissioner had come to several conclusions regarding Belknap Gall. He was sure now that Gall had actually wanted Electrical Industries, Inc., to go into bankruptcy!

It was apparent that Gall had discovered some tremendous secret he did not wish to share with his codirectors. Apparently Kirk Mannersly and Ring Mordat had discovered that secret and were going to demand being declared in as the price of their silence.

And so they had died.

But Belknap Gall's excursion into crime had cost him his life. Some other cunning mind had discovered what Gall had developed. And that one had not desired to share it with Gall.

Wildcat drove with one hand as the coupé sped along the road. The other hand had been busy. Presently a ghostly chuckle drifted from the coupé. Wildcat Gordon had left the trail of crime. The Whisperer had taken it up.

Crime needed solving. But more important even than that were the lives of two girls that were hanging somewhere in the balance. The

Whisperer hoped that those lives were still there to save. If they were, the solution still lay on Staten Island, he felt sure.

He braked the coupé to a stop before a lonely candy store on Victory Boulevard. There was a man The Whisperer knew who might aid him. He was a metallurgical expert who once had needed the aid of The Whisperer to prevent the kidnaping of his child. The expert knew the peculiarities of the men and practices in his industry.

The Whisperer found him at home in Manhattan, husked half a dozen questions over the phone. The queries had to do with the manufacture of stainless steel and with the history and background of Chrome Specialties Corp., of which Genung Rhodman was president.

When the crime foe left the booth, a soft chuckle came from his lips. He knew the answer now to that queer equation, SI9000:225. And he thought he knew where to find the other answers that he sought on Staten Island!

The police radio in the coupé began to crackle as The Whisperer swung out into the road. The St. George announcer informed all cars that the missing Titus Vanderlee had been found. Wet and dripping, the white-haired playboy had been hauled ashore by a stevedore on the Stapleton water front.

Titus had been rushed to headquarters and had told of escaping from the gangster boat and nearly drowning before he got his bonds free. The two girls, he said, had still been aboard when he escaped. Titus had been unable to aid them; he had barely been able to escape himself.

The Whisperer chuckled eerily and removed the odd dental plates from his mouth. He called headquarters on the two-way radio, asked to talk to Vanderlee.

"He has just left," the announcer told him. "He borrowed a car and has returned to Manhattan."

The Whisperer shut off his radio, laughed huskily again. The accelerator went down to the floorboards. The fast coupé shot ahead like a racing greyhound. The nemesis of the underworld took the right-hand turn into Todt Hill Road on two wheels. Rubber screamed, left black streaks on the pavement.

The car roared up Todt Hill Road toward the peak, the highest point of land on the Eastern seaboard. Up near the top there was a great, weird house that was the destination of The Whisperer. It was a house that

had been willed to Chrome Specialties Corp. by an eccentric stockholder some years before. That was one thing The Whisperer had learned from his friend in Manhattan. The place had never been used commercially, but The Whisperer felt certain that it was being used tonight.

Used for the final stroke of a master criminal who had cunningly concealed his tracks!

The road took a slight downward dip as The Whisperer approached the spacious grounds that surrounded the building. He cut the motor, let the coupé coast noiselessly the final hundred yards.

He braked the car gently, stopped in the darkness without sound, and left his coupé with the stealth of which he was capable. He knew that the master killer possessed the power to obliterate all trace of his crime and the lives of persons who might be able to give evidence against him.

That certainly decided The Whisperer that a lone onslaught was necessary; that mass police interference would spell doom for the two innocent girls, one of whom was dearer to Wildcat Gordon than he would have admitted to anyone.

A rough stone wall guarded the spacious grounds. Broken bottles had been set in the cement to keep vagrants from trespassing on the grounds in the days when the eccentric stockholder had lived in the Todt Hill mansion. The Whisperer vaulted the stone wall and landed lightly on the carpet of grass inside.

When he straightened he found himself face to face with Flathead Winston!

Flathead sledged down with a blackjack. The Whisperer fell to the ground. The thug laughed thickly, thinking he had made an easy capture. He stooped to pick up the limp body of the crime foe.

In that he made a mistake.

The Whisperer came up like a mighty piston. One fist crashed against Flathead Winston's jaw. The other clamped tightly over the gang boss' mouth. The ghostlike battler had wanted to be sure of overcoming Flathead without undue noise. He knew that with Winston there would be other members of his gang.

A second blow sent Flathead reeling. The ugly thug was groggy. Then The Whisperer whipped out a supersilenced automatic; he pressed the muzzle against the dish-shaped skull of the mobster. Flathead began to tremble. All of the underworld feared those guns of The Whisperer.

"Where is your boss?" the eerie voice hissed into Flathead's ear.

Winston rolled his eyes. His voice was a thick tremble of fear.

"R-Rhodman," he gulped. "In . . . in the house. F-front door."

A ghostly chuckle came from The Whisperer. He sledged upward once more, knocked consciousness from the misshapen skull. Then he swiftly bound and gagged the mobster and padded toward the towering mansion.

Twice the crime foe was challenged by prowling gangsters. Each time he spoke reassuring words in the thick voice of Flathead. In the dark, the gangsters on guard did not realize they were being tricked.

The Whisperer pondered the words of Flathead Winston as he padded up the broad stairs to the front porch of the building. The mobster had been too scared with a supersilenced pistol pressed against his skull to lie to him. Flathead was

not noted for his nerve in the tight pinches.

The crook had said he was working for Genung Rhodman. A suspicion of a whisper came from the lips of the wraithlike figure who moved silently in the dark.

Crime's master was more clever than he had thought. Soon, if the murdering crook's plans were not interrupted by The Whisperer, he would be in sole possession of a formula and a process that would let him rule one of the most vital industries of a war-torn world single-handed!

Stainless steel, chrome and nickel hardened; vital for armaments, needed by industry and produced in quantities never heard of before!

The Whisperer repressed a chuckle as he reached for the old-fashioned handle of the colonial door in the center of the house. The door was not locked; armed gangsters prowling the grounds apparently were deemed sufficient protection by the master crook.

Noiselessly, The Whisperer glided into the pitch-black center hall. Even the greenish eyes were invisible in the utter darkness. The Whisperer paused, listening. At first he did not hear a sound. He moved softly forward.

Then a raucous laugh burst out from one side of him. He whirled, whipped up one surpersilenced gun. But his fingers did not close on the trigger. A low hum sounded in the room. Swift pain shot through every fiber of his body. Every muscle was paralyzed. A highly charged electric field filled the room, robbing him of the ability to move a muscle.

The raucous laughter broke again. A grating voice came through a loudspeaker that effectively disguised it.

"The room is bathed in infrared light, Whisperer," it taunted. "Through specially treated glass I can see you. But you cannot see me. Now, drop your guns!"

Suddenly the electric field was turned off. Paralyzed muscles contracted, then relaxed involuntarily. The Whisperer's guns clattered to the floor. Instantly the powerful electric field resumed its all-embracing grip.

The humming sound increased. The high frequency of the field was unbelievable. The Whisperer felt his bodily temperature rise; his brain began to whirl and strange shapes appeared before his tortured eyes. Then consciousness left him.

When The Whisperer's brain began to function again, a small hand was shaking him. The greenish eyes opened to see the pretty face of Tiny Traeger leaning over him. The girl's wrists were red where bonds had recently held them.

Near her was blond Jane Weldon. Jane was still struggling with ropes that Tiny had partly untied. The room was dimly illuminated by a hidden, indirect fixture near the ceiling. There seemed to be neither doors nor windows.

A husky whisper of surprise burst from the black-clad fighter's lips. He was surprised to be alive at all. He said so. Tiny shook her head.

"He never kills anyone he thinks might still be of some use to him," she explained. "He must still think we have some value to him alive."

The Whisperer's green eyes glittered.

"He—"

Tiny shrugged.

"I don't know," she admitted. "The only times we've seen him, he's been masked."

Jane Weldon corroborated Tiny's statement. The Whisperer asked the girls how they had gotten off the murder boat of Flathead Winston.

"We don't know that," Tiny said. "We were drugged right after we were taken back on board."

The Whisperer asked her if Titus Vanderlee had been still on the trawler then. Tiny nodded her head in the affirmative.

"I saw his body just before they drugged us," she explained. "We don't know what has happened to him."

The Whisperer prowled around the room. In the ceiling he saw the dim outlines of a trapdoor. Tiny saw the question in his eyes.

"You came through it," she said. "So did we, I guess."

Suddenly Tiny Traeger's face drained of color. A scream of terror welled up from some other part of the old house. It died on a gurgling note of despair. Tiny's lips parted, expressing the horror that she felt.

"I hate to think of it," she said. "An hour ago a voice told us that if the master crook got one thing he wanted, we might possibly go free."

The scream welled up again, vying with the mirthless chuckle of The Whisperer.

"He is trying to get it now," he said. "But he would scarcely free you, anyway. When his trail has been completely covered, he will kill all who have been in contact with him."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE BRAIN OF CRIME.

Tiny Traeger caught her breath. There was a sob in her voice.

"I can hardly stand the sound of that torture," she said. "I wish we could stop it, somehow."

The greenish eyes of The Whisperer watched Tiny. The girl's dark, wavy hair seemed stirred by some faint breeze. Suddenly a whispering exclamation of surprise came from the mysterious investigator. He held up a hand, stood motionless for a moment in concentration. Then he spoke.

"There is a draft here," he said softly. "That means the house has a system of forced ventilation. We cannot get to the criminals. But we have just one chance to bring them to us!"

The Whisperer whipped an egg-shaped smoke bomb from his pocket. He directed the two girls to cover their faces with handkerchiefs. Then he examined the windowless chamber closely. He followed the slightest indication of a draft. Near the ceiling on one side he found an expertly hidden grille. He smashed the smoke bomb against that.

The whitish, acrid fumes filled the room, choking The Whisperer and the two girls. Then the smoke began to thin, sucked from the atmosphere by the exhaust fan. In a moment a shout sounded from the floor above. Feet pounded in the hallway.

"He's set the place afire!" the thick voice of Flathead Winston growled.

The Whisperer chuckled softly in that minor triumph. Flathead had jumped at exactly the conclusion the crime foe had wanted. There was a creaking sound above as the trapdoor swung down slightly. The Whisperer stood back under the hinged end of the trap. The door lowered.

Then The Whisperer sprang. Steely fingers gripped the lip of the swinging door. It dropped suddenly, catapulting Flathead Winston down into the room. For the second time that night The Whisperer

was face to face with the dish-skulled killer. With a chuckling hiss of challenge, The Whisperer grappled. A Judo grip paralyzed the nerves in one of Flathead's arms. Excruciating pain shot through the other arm. Flathead groaned.

Then The Whisperer hissed quick orders into the killer's ear. Flathead's nerve failed him again. He repeated words that the dark battler gave him.

"O. K., boys, I got him," Flathead mumbled. "Get back to your posts before the boss discovers what happened."

Feet shuffled overhead. The guards moved outside to resume their patrol of the grounds. The Whisperer chuckled softly. The trapdoor was a long, thin rectangle. When the end was lowered to the floor of the chamber it created a ribbed incline that could be used as a stairway.

Up that The Whisperer forced his captive. Tiny Traeger and Jane Weldon followed him. As they reached what was apparently the main floor of the old house, a new scream of anguish welled up into the air. Raucous laughter followed the dying gurgle of the scream. Crime's master was enjoying the torture he was inflicting on his victim.

The Whisperer searched Flathead quickly. He found two loaded automatics on the killer. Then he tied him securely. He handed one of the automatics to Tiny Traeger.

"Watch him closely," the eerie voice told her. "If he makes one false move, shoot him!"

With that The Whisperer padded softly down the hallway in the direction of the screams.

The raucous laughter came again as the ghostlike crime fighter glided down the hall. It seemed to come from directly ahead. But the hallway ended in a blank wall. Two smaller corridors led off to the sides at an angle. The Whisperer turned to the right. The burst of laughter came again, followed by low, threatening tones of conversation. The black-clad battler could not distinguish words, but the direction seemed to be on his left.

The corridor turned then to the left. Still, the sounds of conversation seemed to come from over his left shoulder. Then The Whisperer realized that there was some chamber in the core of the house around which this corridor turned and twisted. There seemed to be no means of ingress.

The Whisperer pressed sensitive fingers against the wall as he pushed on. He probed for hidden levers or buttons that might open a hidden panel.

He found one with swifter action than he was prepared for. The panel swung with a section of the floor. It whirled with a snap that catapulted The Whisperer into a garishly lighted octagonal chamber. He landed sprawling on all fours in the center of the room.

In one corner a figure was tightly lashed between two flat carbon electrodes. A blue spark arced from the electrodes across the body of the prisoner. The helpless man, sweat gleaming on his face, was Genung Rhodman!

Above the helpless metallurgist was the dissipated face of Titus Vanderlee III! Stark lines of cruelty showed in the features of the playboy now. His eyes blazed with mad purpose as he turned toward The Whisperer.

He whipped one hand to a rheostat.

"If you move one hand, I'll cook Rhodman in two seconds," Vanderlee snarled. "I can blast us all to hell before you could squeeze a trigger!"

The Whisperer did not move. His purpose in coming into this room had been to save Genung Rhodman, not to insure his death.

Titus Vanderlee kept one hand on the rheostat. The other pulled a sleek automatic from one pocket. He leveled it at The Whisperer.

"Upon your co-operation may depend the life of this man," he snarled. "Slide your gun across the floor. Then stand up and turn your back."

The Whisperer was covered. If Vanderlee had not also held another's life in the hand on the rheostat, the dark figure would have plunged ahead and tried to dive under the gun Titus held trained on him. But not only was Rhodman's life in the balance, but also the lives of the two girls who were between this weird chamber and the gangsters who prowled the grounds outside.

The Whisperer did as he was told. Titus Vanderlee's hand did not leave the rheostat. He ordered The Whisperer to back up to him with his hands behind him. The playboy crook slipped a noose over his wrists, pulled it tight. Then he tied them.

He guffawed then in raucous laughter.

"You, my friend, I shall dispose of. Rhodman, here, has a chance to live."

Genung Rhodman's booming voice burst into profanity.

"You're lying, Titus. You could never let me go alive."

Vanderlee grinned evilly.

"Still, it's your only chance," he reminded. "If you sign a confession to the murders of Mannersly, Mordat and Gall, my cover-up will be complete. Even Flathead thinks he is working for you. If the cops put him under pressure, he'll swear to it. I've made myself up to look like you every time I've seen Flathead.

"Actually, I didn't kill Mannersly. Gall killed him because he had learned too much. After Gall had arranged the first kidnaping of Mary Jane Weldon, he came to me. He thought I was working for him, but I fooled him as I fooled the rest of you."

Titus grinned at The Whisperer. He was extremely pleased with himself. Enough so to boast.

"I suspected Gall had developed something pretty special when he tried to bribe me to steal Rhodman's formula," he went on, "so I did some investigating myself. When Gall staged his phony murder set-up I pretended I was drunk. Before I untied him I searched his office and found out what it was. Then I decided I'd take the whole thing over.

"I had Flathead cart a dummy made up to look like me aboard the boat. If any of you escaped, that would alibi me for the kidnaping of Belknap Gall. And if I needed the alibi someone would have to get away. That's why the two girls are still alive." Titus laughed madly. "I've got the formula and I've got Gall's superpower. I've spent all my family's money, but with those I'll have more millions than my father ever thought of making."

The Whisperer turned slowly around. His hands were tightly bound. Titus didn't make any objection. Connected to the two electrodes by heavy copper cables were two compact generators the size of packing boxes. These, The Whisperer knew, were the equipment

cases stolen from Belknap Gall's experimental laboratory earlier in the night.

The Whisperer thought of that simple equation he had found in Gall's wastebasket in Manhattan. The figures came from his lips now in a husky whisper: "SI9000:225."

Titus laughed again.

"Portable power that can generate 9,000 degrees can operate a smelting furnace of 225 tons capacity," he sneered. "That is the capacity of the open-hearth steel process. It is the system of making cheap stainless steel that metallurgists have been searching for since stainless steel was first developed! Three quarters of the high cost of chrome-and-nickel steel is forced because of the electric-furnace limitation of fifty tons at present temperatures."

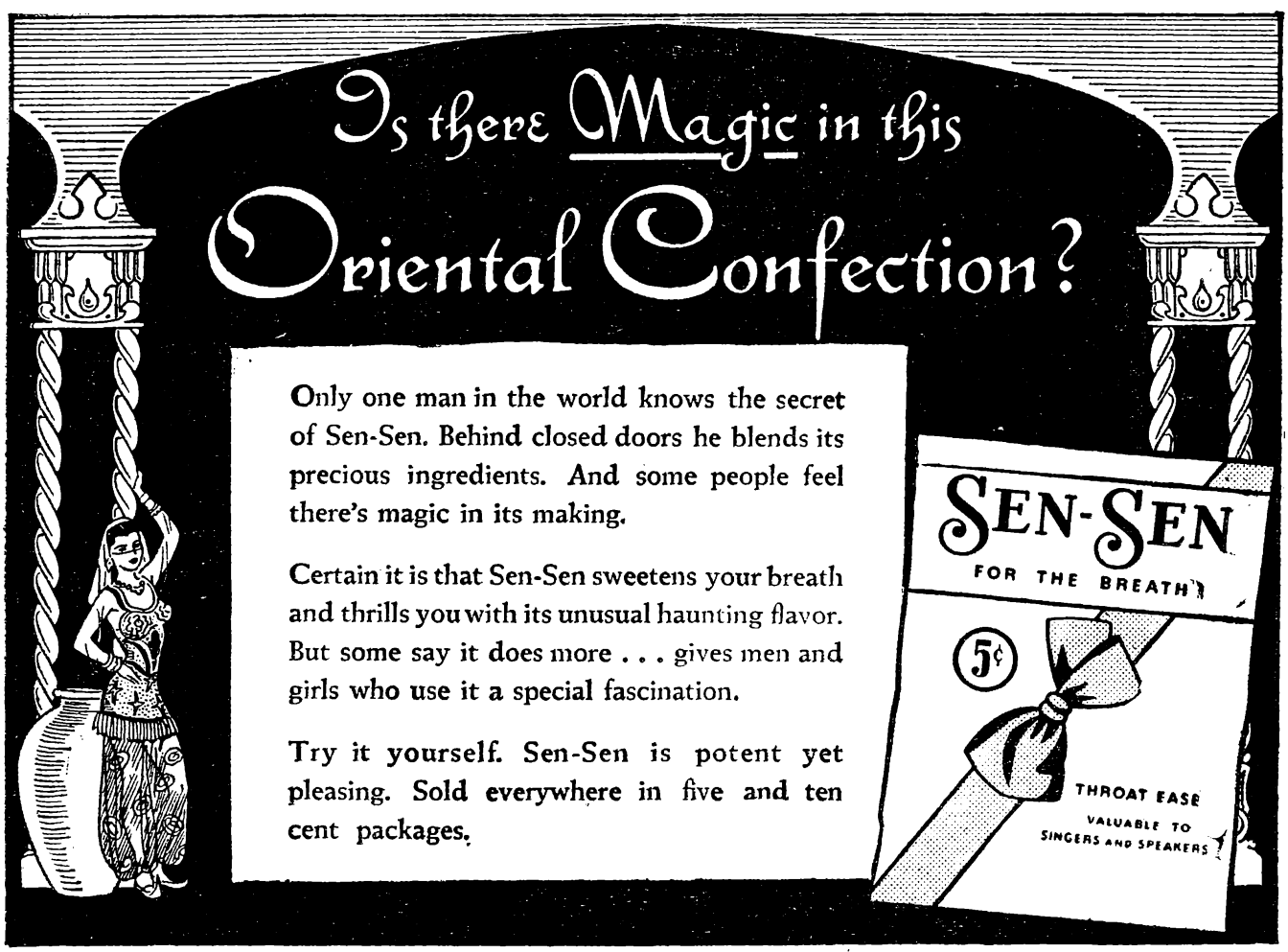
Titus snarled then and whirled on the helpless figure of Genung Rhodman.

"Sign a confession, damn you!" he shouted. "That's all I need to make my plans complete!"

Vanderlee's neck turned an apoplectic red. Rage overcame his caution. He shook both fists momentarily under Rhodman's nose.

In that instant The Whisperer acted. He had just a split second in which to dive before Titus could get his fingers back on that rheostat control.

He dived straight at Vanderlee's bent back. He had to hit exactly right. Titus grunted at the impact of The Whisperer's hurtling body. He fought for balance. But the crime fighter's lunge carried Titus



straight on top of the helpless form of Genung Rhodman.

Titus' fingers closed on the rheostat. Then he screamed. His own body was also in the path of the jumping spark gap. His convulsing muscles nearly pulled the rheostat lever all the way over, in spite of his efforts to shove it back.

In the seconds that followed, The Whisperer tugged at the loose loop which formed the basis of the knot that held his wrists. It gave just as Titus freed himself and whirled to attack. The sleek automatic came out again. But this time Titus did not have his other hand on the rheostat.

The Whisperer dived under the roaring gun, felt lead burn down his back. Then he had Titus around the knees. The playboy fell heavily, squirmed to free himself from the lithe battler's grasp. He reached frantically with one hand for the death-dealing switch.

The Whisperer's feet shot out and kicked the body of Genung Rhodman sharply. The metallurgist was still bound, but the stout kick unbalanced his body. He fell from the small platform between the two electrodes just as Titus' hand closed on the switch, shoved the rheostat up to its highest frequency!

The arc leaped, uninterrupted, across the gap between the two. Instantly the platform itself glowed red-hot, then white. Searing waves of heat leaped into the air.

The Whisperer wheeled, slamming one compact fist into Titus' jaw. The playboy stumbled, groped for his gun. The crime foe hit him again, and Vanderlee went down.

Then The Whisperer leaned over Genung Rhodman; swiftly he untied his bonds. Rhodman sat up and began to work on the bonds at his ankles. Titus was staggering to his feet then. He began to scream for the mobsters who were on guard outside; then he pressed a button that opened sliding panels in the wall of the room.

Gunmen poured into the room with guns flaming. Flathead Winston, his face scratched and bleeding, rushed in with them. Titus Vanderlee screamed murderously.

"Kill them! Kill them both, damn them!"

But in his rage, Titus had forgotten for a mad moment that he had always appeared to Flathead in the guise of Genung Rhodman! Flathead did not shoot at the man he thought to be his boss. Instead, he poured lead into Titus Vanderlee!

The playboy crook staggered back against a wall switch. Fresh power leaped from the two electrodes. One end of the room burst into roaring flame. The old mansion that Vanderlee's grandfather had willed to Chrome Specialties Corp. was a firetrap. The forced ventilation of the modern air-conditioning plant swept the flames from room to room like a windstorm.

Vanderlee fell to the floor of the room he had been using as a torture chamber. He pawed the air with his gun, cursing Flathead Winston for turning on him. Titus managed to squeeze the trigger once, and the bullet plowed into Flathead's chest.

Genung Rhodman was on his feet then. He staggered toward the door. The room had become a blazing inferno. The Whisperer picked up the slumped form of Vanderlee, dragged it from the room and down the corridor.

Near the front door he found Tiny Traeger and Jane Weldon. Both were tied. Tiny looked sheepishly

at The Whisperer. She said that Flathead had held her attention while one of his henchmen crept up on her from behind.

Genung Rhodman untied the two girls. They followed The Whisperer out into the spacious yard.

Flames were leaping into the air by that time. The wail of fire sirens sounded down Todt Hill Road. The sharper scream of police cars blended with them.

The Whisperer dragged Titus Vanderlee to a place of safety against the stone fence. The white-haired playboy was raging impotently. The particular object of his ire was Genung Rhodman.

"The formula isn't worth anything once it becomes known," Titus screamed. "It's based on principles too recognizable for him to patent it. That's why he wanted to control production."

Titus laughed insanely. The pain of his wounds seemed to be driving coherence from his mind.

"I can't have control of stainless steel," he jibbered. "So no one will have it."

Titus Vanderlee stiffened then. His eyes glazed, then stared vacantly ahead of him. The playboy murderer was dead. As he died, fire apparatus roared into the driveway. Behind it, a police car jerked to a halt. Quick Trigger and Bolton leaped from the front seat. Behind them raced Slug Minor and Roger Merrill.

Tiny Traeger straightened, looked apprehensively around. Then she relaxed. The Whisperer was gone.

Ten years seemed to drop from Quick Trigger's shoulders when he saw Tiny. Even more from Roger Merrill when he saw Jane Weldon. The two were in each other's arms in an instant.

Henry Bolton began asking a lot of unnecessary questions. When he earned that The Whisperer had been there he shouted orders to cops and firemen to surround the place and seize everybody who tried to escape.

The idea turned out to be a good one. It didn't net The Whisperer. But the cops did corral the rest of Flathead Winston's mob who were trying to sneak off the grounds. While Henry was being important about that, Wildcat Gordon strode into the yard.

"What's going on, Henry?" he demanded.

Several people began to talk at once. Finally Wildcat turned to Genung Rhodman.

"It's too bad you couldn't patent your formula," he suggested.

Rhodman nodded.

"I guess I'm licked," he sighed.

Wildcat looked at the couple who were still in each other's arms.

"Perhaps a combination of Electrical Industries' power system with your formula could be operated privately to everybody's advantage."

Jane Weldon's face lighted at the suggestion.

"We'll form a new corporation," she said promptly. "Genung Rhodman, Roger Merrill and Jane—"

"Merrill," Roger finished for her, and put his arms more closely around her shoulders.

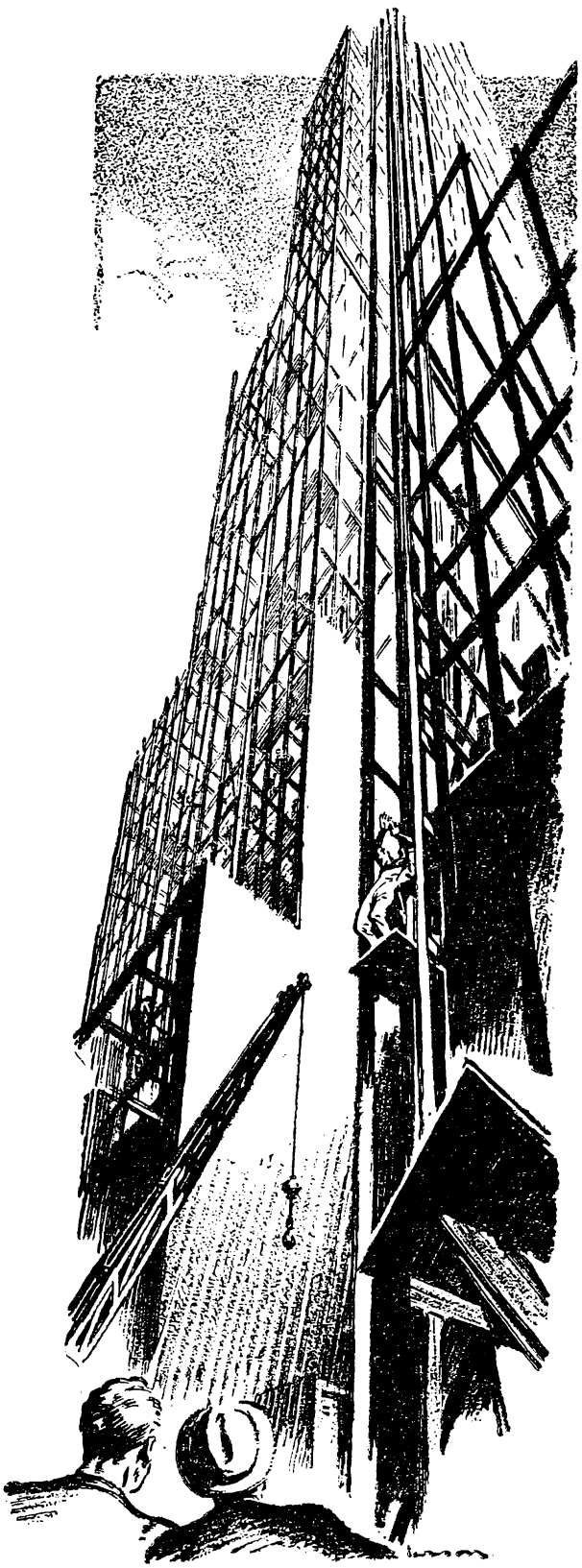
Tiny Traeger looked softly at the girl's happy face. Then she glanced disgustedly at Wildcat.

"You seem to know a lot for someone who wasn't even here," she said. She smiled knowingly.

THE END.

THE INVISIBLE MENACE

By Norman A. Daniels



CHAPTER I.

INVISIBLE KILLER.

The skeleton of the thirty-five-story building stuck up in the late-afternoon sky like the bones of some incredibly gigantic prehistoric creature. Men swarmed over the girders, the *rat-tat* of the riveting guns sounded like a miniature battle of rapid-fire rifles. And, at the highest point of the building, a man stepped onto a small elevator platform, waved to those on the ground and started down.

Dynamite Dolan, chief trouble-shooter for the Acme Construction Co., watched the elevator descend and listened to Assistant Superintendent Weaver relate a grim story.

"That's Bob Temple coming down on that lift," he said. "Bob knows more about this superstition business than any of us, and he's the only man who laughs at it. Says that gravestone we dug up with those bones is as funny as it is phony; that a blind man could reach the same conclusion. Me—I'm not so sure."

Could these deaths be tied up with that grim warning on the headstone and the spirits of men long dead? Dynamite Dolan didn't believe so—and chose to fight to prove his theories!

"How many men have died so far?" Dolan asked. He was a huge, wide-shouldered man with the narrowing waistline of a fighter. His face was big, not exactly handsome, but his eyes could twinkle and his mouth fashion itself into a ready smile. He was called Dynamite for two reasons—first, because he used to make his living as a blasting expert until he discovered he was a better detective; secondly, because he moved as fast as the discharge of high explosive. Plenty of tunnel-muckers, steelworkers and ground crews could attest to that.

Weaver counted on his fingers. "There was Bryan—he fell off one of those side-wall girders. Someone, or something, had greased the girder. Then a load of steel fell on Jimmy Jordan—the cable seemed to have been frayed and weakened by a file. Next it was Storkoski, a laborer. Somebody dropped a hammer on his skull, but we couldn't find out whose hammer it was. It all started soon after we excavated and dug up those bones and that damned gravestone. Had a look at it yet, Dolan?"

"I'll talk to the super first," Dolan said. "He'll be down in a minute."

They both looked up at the descending lift. It was a platform type, crude and open so that the operator could be seen from every angle. Temple, the job super, rode the lift alone. Halfway down the drop he waved his hand as he made out Dolan's fiery thatch of hair and recognized him. Then, suddenly, Temple seemed to be in trouble. Dolan saw him straighten up as though he'd been slapped across the back with a terrific blow. His two hands raised upward and left the controls. The elevator stopped dead. Then Temple lurched forward and in falling, tried to save himself by clutching at the controls again. His right arm caught against the lever, pulling it back. The lift began its slow journey to the ground once more.

"He must be sick," Weaver yelled. "Come on, Dolan, we'll help him."

They raced over to where the elevator was rapidly coming to a halt. Automatic safety devices checked it. Temple, half raised by his caught arm, hung partly off the platform. Before the lift came to a shuddering stop, Dolan was on it. He freed Temple's arm, lowered the man to the floor and then he gave an audible gasp of horror. There was an odd-looking knife driven hilt-deep through his back. Temple was dead!

Dolan looked up at the towering steel structure. Not a soul had been anywhere near the lift. Temple had been quite alone on it—therefore where had that knife come from? What manner of invisible force buried it deep in Temple's back?

"He's been murdered," Dolan snapped to Weaver. "Better phone the police. And get every man down off the job. I want them all lined up. Either somebody on that job stabbed Temple, or a ghost did it—and I don't believe in ghosts. Snap it up, Weaver, before the killer gets away."

An hour later, Dolan sat on the edge of a desk inside a huge mansion adjoining the building in the process of erection. He held the murder weapon in one hand.

"This," he told the detectives and officials present, "is a Scottish dirk—it has a long blade and a short, engraved haft. None of these have been manufactured for well over a hundred years."

Assistant Superintendent Weaver pressed forward. "Then it must be true," he said in a shaking voice.

"It must be! When we excavated, we dug up the cemetery of an old Scottish tribe that settled here about 1650. We got the date from a tombstone—that one over in the corner."

Dolan glanced at the thin, time-worn slab of granite. Years had erased its original design, but the words were still visible. He read them with a shudder:

PEACE AT LAST
WITH DEATH—RELIEF.
WHO MOVES MY BONES
WILL COME TO GRIEF.

"And Bob Temple died before he could tell us what he found out," Dolan said softly. "Now the men are quitting. This whole job is a jinx, and they know it. There isn't a more superstitious bunch of men in the world than ironworkers. They won't come back until we prove no ghost killed Temple."

"How you going to do it, Dolan?" a detective sergeant asked with a wry smile. "There wasn't a mark on the knife, nobody was within a hundred feet of the elevator when Temple died. The knife can't be traced and—well, although you're supposed to be pretty good, this time I think you'll be stumped—just like we are."

Dolan frowned and turned away. He couldn't even see where he might start. There wasn't even a suspect. Why should men be ruthlessly murdered on a job of this kind? How could a murderer possibly profit by it? There was a reason for Temple's death, of course—he knew something, and the superstitions of the ironworkers weren't shared by him.

The room cleared rapidly until Dolan was alone. He looked around the place and rubbed his chin slowly. Until the construction of the building next door began, this house had been occupied by a very wealthy man, a bachelor who maintained a huge corps of servants. The place was as big as a museum.

Someone tapped on the door and entered at Dolan's barked command. It was an elderly, thin-shouldered, watery-eyed man who carried a gun holstered on his hip and an electric lantern.

"I'm Gallard, the watchman," he said. "Just checkin' up kind of. Thought I'd let you know I was around."

Dolan nodded and sat down behind the desk. Gallard made his rounds, bobbed his head as he went out the door and silence crept over the house. For perhaps twenty minutes Dolan sat lost in thought and never a glimmer of an idea came through the veil. There simply wasn't any reason for these murders. Unless a man possessed a belief in the grim warning of that tombstone and the spirits of men long dead, he was up against a stone wall in this investigation.

Dolan heard a slight creaking sound and looked up quickly. His right hand shot toward his hip pocket and the .45 automatic holstered there, but he was too late. Three men barged into the room, all armed and ready to shoot. One of them was a beetle-browed, barrel-chested gorilla who seemed to be in command. He stepped up to Dolan and shoved the muzzle of his gun against his middle.

"So this is Dynamite Dolan, the toughest mug in the world! You don't look so hot to me. Lift 'em high while I frisk you, and then we're going for a nice little ride. If you're a good guy and listen to reason, you'll come back. If you don't—well, there's lots of ways to

hide what's left of a monkey like you. Get going!"

Dolan was searched and then led out of the house to where a car was parked at the curb. He got in, said nothing, but kept himself tense to take advantage of the slightest opportunity which might present itself. But these men had been warned, and knew his reputation. Two guns kept drilling into Dolan's ribs every foot of the way. Their destination lay well out of the city and when they reached the outskirts, Dolan began counting telephone poles so that he might gauge the distance if he was lucky enough to get clear and came back to round up these men.

They were ordinary gangsters, perhaps a bit more ruthless than the average type, and certainly primed for murder. He could see that in their eyes.

Finally the car pulled off the road and stopped behind a small bungalow set well back from the road and masked by a row of tall firs. Dolan was forced out of the car, led into the house and ordered to sit down in a tiny living room. The three men who had kidnaped him took up advantageous positions around the room and kept their guns exposed.

CHAPTER II.

THE GHOST STRIKES AGAIN.

A thin-faced man, dressed in a loud checked suit, sauntered into the room and swaggered up to Dolan. He sneered openly at the helpless trouble-shooter, dragged a chair over beside him and straddled it.

"Now listen, Dolan," he said curtly. "I know you, and I'm taking no chances. We tried to talk to Temple, but he wouldn't see things our way—so either you see reason, or get what Temple got! There's been a lot of accidents at that job. I know how to stop 'em. What you need is protection, see? It'll cost ten percent of the total price of the job. You can saddle it on the corporation that hired the work done. We take a cut tomorrow afternoon or—somebody else dies! Maybe you!"

Dolan relaxed, and smiled thinly. "So it's not ghosts, eh? Just a rotten shake-down racket. When the boys find this out, they'll tear you and your mob to pieces. Thanks, rat, for telling me this much and the answer is—no!"

The thin crook snorted in contempt. "You can't convince those iron men that ghosts ain't killing off those guys. They'll say you're just trying to explain things away so they'll go back to work. It's no soap, Dolan, because if you refuse, you won't be able to tell 'em anything. You won't leave this place, understand? You got one minute to change your mind, and then four of my boys tag with you until we get our rake-off. Don't be a sap. What's it to you, anyway? The guys who are putting up that building got plenty of dough."

Dolan looked down at the floor and nodded slowly, as if in agreement with the crook. His big hands were clenched, and he seemed to pay no attention to anyone else in the room. But Dolan's slitted eyes saw that the crook's chair was within easy reach and that the skinny thug kept rocking it back and forth.

Suddenly Dolan's right hand shot out, grasped one leg of the chair and gave it a terrific yank. The crook went flying off it to land in a sitting position on the floor. Dolan retained his grip on the chair, arose quickly and spun around fast. The chair, held at arm's length, threat-

ened all three of the armed thugs in the room and they were hastily ducking away to safer positions, more intent on saving their own skins than trying to gun Dolan down.

He let the chair go suddenly and followed in its wake so fast that the gunmen were unable to check his movements. The chair clipped one man across the head, sent him reeling back—and before his befuddled senses could straighten out, Dolan slugged him under the chin. As the man went down, Dolan seized the gun he held. He whirled, shooting from the hip. Dolan was a master at this quick trigger work. One of the men across the room dropped, yelling in pain and clawing at his side. The other of the trio of kidnapers emitted a bleat of terror and did a nosedive out of the room. The skinny leader of the pack had already vanished. Dolan rushed over to the side of the wounded thug, disarmed him, and now held two guns ready for quick shooting.

Outside, in the small hallway, the skinny crook was giving orders. "He can't get outa that room without showing himself, and then we'll burn him down. Joe—go outside and watch the window. I'll check the door. In ten minutes the rest of the boys will be here, and then we'll smoke the monkey out."

Dolan heard a door close, and he made sure that he kept out of range of the one window in the room. It made his blood boil to think that two men could hold him trapped like this, but he knew that a sudden sortie from the room would more than probably end with his absorbing a few slugs. The men who held him prisoner had only the doorway to watch, while Dolan had to get through it, locate them, and shoot mighty fast.

He backed into a corner, glanced at his watch and found that two minutes had elapsed. If the skinny crook spoke the truth, and a number of other men were due to arrive, his goose was cooked to a turn. Dolan glanced around the room. His eyes, trained on all manner of construction jobs, saw that the house was a cheaply built affair with all the earmarks of having been constructed by one man in his spare time and with discarded pieces of timber. He glanced down at the baseboard near his feet. It was loose, and had sprung away from the wall. Dolan bent down, gave it a terrific yank and pulled it free. The uneven ends of the floor boards were revealed. He chuckled softly, wrapped powerful fingers around the edge of one of the boards and braced himself. He fired a single shot toward the door, pulled one floor board up and the roar of his weapon masked the noise. Two more shots drew howling curses from the skinny crook and more of the floor was torn up. Dolan mentally thanked the careless carpenter who had built the house.

He had created a good-sized hole, and he expertly gauged its size compared to his own girth. He heard the crook outside watching the window yell in high glee and at the same time tires scraped on the cinder drive. The rest of the mob had arrived.

Dolan waited no longer. He squeezed himself through the hole in the floor, dropped into the cellar and rushed over to one of the small windows. Crouched down behind it, he saw that six burly men had arrived and were drawing guns as they hurried into the house. Dolan heard them stealthily maneuvering toward the living room above and knew that there was no time to be lost. He raised the cellar window cau-

tiously. One man stood near the front of the house, gun in hand. He was nothing but a shadowy blob against a darker horizon, but Dolan's keen eyes spotted him.

Dolan stuffed his gun into his pocket, drew himself up and half out of the window. At that moment the mob in the hallway charged into the living room. He heard their grunts of awe, and then someone screeched the news of finding that hole in the floor. Dolan waited no longer. He wriggled completely through the window. The crook at the front of the house heard him lurching to his feet. He turned, trying to penetrate the gloom. Dolan gave a leap which carried him over to the car. The outside guard opened fire. Dolan's gun exploded and the thug dropped for cover. Dolan yanked open the door beside the driver's seat, crammed behind the wheel and heard someone yell a warning.

Shots came in jagged flashes from the living room, the slugs cracking the glass in the unbreakable door window. Dolan rolled down the window a trifle, thrust his gun out and emptied it into the living-room window. There was no more shooting. He stepped on the starter, put the car into reverse and backed quickly down the drive.

The guard who had ducked behind a bush arose to his feet, started running after the car and trying to aim at the same time. Dolan suddenly shifted from reverse into first, stepped on the gas pedal hard and sent the sedan hurtling straight at this armed thug. The man gave a wild dive to one side, lost his gun and went skidding on his face across the grass. Dolan grinned happily, reached the highway in front of the house and headed back toward the city. He was whistling gayly when he first noticed an occasional glint in the rear-view mirror. A car with-

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out lights was chasing him. Undoubtedly it was the sedan in which he had been taken to the farmhouse.

His whistle died abruptly. He turned in his seat and looked back. The sedan was gaining rapidly, and seemed to be a more powerful car than the one Dolan had commandeered. Dolan drew his second gun, the only loaded weapon he had now. At that moment something ripped through the back of his car. The rear window cobwebbed. Any moment one of those slugs might find a mark in a tire or the gas tank. Dolan set his jaws and looked for an out. He was rolling across level country. There was no other traffic on the road. A State Highway fence ended suddenly and there was a wide, clear field probably used as pasture land.

Dolan took a strong grip on the wheel, hunched himself and got braced. He twisted the wheel savagely. The car careened off the pavement, struck the soft, bumpy field and went hurtling on. Dolan couldn't have stopped if he had wanted to. He bounced up and down in the seat, smashing his head on the roof occasionally. Gradually he eased up on the gas and began zigzagging carefully. He took a chance, peered out the window and saw that the crooks' car was still on the highway, its headlights turned on to flood the field and bring Dolan into relief as a target. But Dolan's bumpy course took him out of range of their guns.

If they started for him, he'd have the advantage now, for those men couldn't possibly shoot straight while their car hurtled those bumps. But instead of following, the sedan backed hastily, straightened out and pointed her nose back to the city. It vanished at a rapid speed. Dolan laid down his gun, wiped his face and blinked. Of all the narrow escapes, this one led all the others. Only a miracle had saved him from turning over.

But those crooks were heading back to the city and, very probably, the construction job, to get in as much of their sabotage as possible. Dolan eased the car back to the highway and then opened her up once more. He stopped a dozen blocks from the construction job, got out and trotted briskly along the sidewalk.

It was almost midnight when he turned into the doorway of the mansion that adjoined the job. He fumbled in his pocket, found the keys and reached for the lock. The door was very slightly ajar.

Dolan drew his gun, opened the door far enough to slip inside and stood in the gloom of the hallway listening. No sound reached his ears. He moved toward the big living room that had been turned into headquarters for the construction superintendents and architects. His foot touched something limp. Dolan knew what it was. He fumbled around on the wall, located the light switch and snapped it on. A man's form lay at his feet. Dolan made certain no one else lurked in the room before he knelt and turned the body over. He shivered at the sight of the man's face and turned his eyes away. It was the fancy-pants leader of the racket mob. Someone had knocked him down, knelt on his chest and choked him to death. His face wasn't pleasant to look upon.

CHAPTER III.

DEATH RIDES HIGH.

Dolan almost involuntarily glanced over to the corner where the gravestone had been leaning. It no

longer stood. Someone had tipped it over. Dolan walked quietly toward the desk, ready to phone headquarters about the new kill.

As he passed by a window, he glanced up at the towering skeleton of steel. He squinted and pressed his nose against the dirty windowpane. There was a streak of light shining straight down from one of the highest girders. No one had any business being up there at this time of night. Even a skilled, nerveless ironworker would hardly have dared to move around these narrow girders in the dark.

Dolan raced out of the house, vaulted a pile of cement bags, dodged around machinery and tool houses until he reached the small elevator on which Bob Temple had met his death. He jerked the controls and the lift began to rise. Dolan remembered that Temple had been standing in just the same position when death struck out at him. Dolan grimaced and crouched as close to the floor as he could, making a small target of himself. Nothing happened, and he reached the top of the building without incident. He stepped off the platform onto one of the ribbons of steel, ran along it expertly and without the slightest fear, even though an eternity of space lay beneath him.

The streak of light served as an excellent beacon. There was something dark and ominous dangling off the girder. Dolan reached the spot and gasped. It was the watery-eyed watchman. The back of his skull was caved in and he lay balanced on the girder so that the slightest change in position would have sent him hurtling down into space. The streak of light came from the electric lantern still strapped to his waist.

Dolan knew there was nothing he could do for this man. As gingerly as a sword dancer, he turned around on his narrow perch and retraced his steps back to the lift. He climbed aboard it, started the mechanism and began to drop slowly back to earth. His mind was concerned with the relation of these two new murders to the other killings. Not until he reached a point twenty feet above the spot where Temple had met death did he recall that grisly incident, and he ducked hastily. A fraction of a second later something struck a girder with a metallic spanging sound which was repeated several times from various points below him, as though the object was hitting other girders in its descent to earth.

Dolan yanked the controls and stopped the lift. He turned his face skyward and saw absolutely nothing. If anyone had been clinging to one of the girders, he would have been silhouetted perfectly against the sky. He held his gun ready for action, trigger pulled back. But he had no target—no enemy to shoot at. Dolan didn't wonder why the ironworkers had refused to return to their jobs. Powerful and fearless as they were, it was impossible to fight an invisible menace.

He reached the ground, ran over to a workman's tool shed and procured a flashlight. Armed with this, he began searching the ground until he found what had rattled so insistently against the girders. It was a Scottish dirk, a duplicate of the one which had killed Temple.

Suddenly Dolan cocked his head to one side, listening intently. He heard hard rapping sounds that seemed to come from the mansion. Dolan raced back to the house and found the door, which he had left open, now closed and locked. He hauled out his keys, opened the door gently and went in. Halfway down

the dark corridor something tugged at his ankles. He gave an involuntary cry and lost his balance. His heavy body struck the floor with a thump that shook the house.

Before he could arise, something dark and fury-filled, came hurtling down on him. A heavy instrument that felt like a gun butt slammed across the back of his neck. He raised his right hand slowly, trying to get his gun in a position for shooting. Then he realized that the gun was no longer in his hand. He started to turn his head to get a look at the hovering figure above him. Another blow slashed down, glancing across his temple. He fell limp, and heard a grunt of satisfaction from the attacker.

Fighting valiantly to recover his wits and restore strength to his paralyzed limbs, Dolan was also dimly aware that he was doomed. The figure knelt beside him and he could see the glitter of a knife. With a last desperate effort, Dolan broke free of the grip that held him prone. He raised one foot and kicked out. It found a vulnerable mark and drew a sharp cry of pain. The kneeling figure was toppled over by the force of the kick.

This measure of success helped to clear Dolan's brain. He climbed to his knees, tried to penetrate the inky darkness and find his enemy. Nothing moved. Dolan hauled himself up on his feet and stood swaying, his head giddy from the two vicious blows that had all but cracked his scalp wide open. Something moved to his left. He gave a bellow of rage and charged forward on legs that would barely support him. His charge took him into the huge living room. A dark form came hurtling toward him. Dolan lashed out, struck an unresisting jaw and sent the figure flying backward. With a shout of elation he leaped upon the man, closed big hands around the enemy's throat and squeezed.

Suddenly there were many footsteps in the hallway and the lights were turned on. Dolan shook his head as he stared into the face of the man he had attacked. It was the fancy-pants mobster! He had been fighting a dead man!

"Don't move!" someone growled. "Boys—watch the rat. Look—he killed Benny! Strangled him to death! We got here too late. O. K.! Dolan, get up, and be careful what you do with your hands. I'd as soon blast you out as not. Benny was my pal."

Dolan arose very slowly, very carefully. He kept his hands rigidly extended from his sides and turned around to face the guns of three crooks whom he already knew. They were the men who had kidnaped him.

"Wait a minute," Dolan said hoarsely. "I didn't kill this pal of yours. He was dead when I got here. There's somebody else in this house. Whoever it is murdered Benny. I didn't."

"Listen to him talk!" one of the thugs snarled. "Expects us to believe that! Take him out, boys—and never mind how you handle him. We'll throw what's left of him in the city dump."

"You're a pack of half-wits!" Dolan roared. "I was fighting the man who killed Benny. He must have thrown Benny's corpse into my arms to stall me so he could get away and hide. He's still in the house, I tell you!"

The three thugs sneered at Dolan and moved closer. Something snapped in Dolan's brain. He gave a savage shout, lowered his hands and moved with all the speed for which he was famous. Guns cracked

A bullet nicked his arm, another gouged a furrow across one thigh, but Dolan hardly felt them. One of the thugs left the floor under the impact of Dolan's fist. He landed outside the hallway. The other two were too astounded to shoot again, even if Dolan had given them the chance. He swung around and launched himself through space. The two thugs yelped in alarm, turned and fled. The man Dolan had sent skyrocketing out of the room didn't join in the retreat. He was out cold.

The front door slammed shut. Dolan didn't try to pursue the thugs who escaped. Instead he searched the man he had knocked out, got his gun and then ran up the stairs to the second floor. As he reached the landing, a gun cracked. Dolan returned the fire, aiming at random and only hoping to prevent the killer from getting in another shot. He heard the scampering of very unghostly feet cross the floor of the room at the end of the corridor. Dolan put his back against the wall and inched toward the room. He raised his gun slightly for a quick down-draw, snapped on his flash and bolted into the room. It was empty! There wasn't even a stick of furniture in the place. But the one window was wide open. He sprang toward it and peered out into the night. Nothing moved. He considered the distance to the ground. Unless the killer had landed on something very soft, he'd be still on the ground, with broken legs or a broken neck.

Dolan tore down the steps, raced out of the house, around it and came to a stop just below the window. There was no one to be seen, either running away or lying unconscious on the ground. For the first time since all this had happened, Dolan began to doubt his senses. A brief exploration of the vicinity revealed a pile of sand onto which a man might have leaped, but there wasn't a mark on it. It lay just as the truck had dumped it.

Dolan's big hands clenched and unclenched. He remembered that he was once an ironworker, a tunnel-mucker, a bridge-builder, and all the superstition so rife in their make-up was also a part of him. Then he slowly massaged his skull, felt the bumps inflicted by the mysterious killer, and grinned ruefully. No ghost fashioned those eggs. Human muscles, human hatred and desperation were responsible for them.

He walked slowly back to the front of the house in time to stop two radio patrolmen who were answering an alarm due to the shooting. Dolan hung around only long enough to answer the questions of the homicide squad. Then he hailed a taxi and was driven to a moderate-priced hotel about eight blocks from the construction job. All the skilled ironworkers lived there. So did Weaver, the assistant superintendent. Weaver came downstairs fully dressed. As he crossed the floor, something scraped under his shoes and he looked down with an annoyed frown.

He listened to Dolan's story and gasped in astonishment. "Dolan," he said slowly, "this ends it. When the men hear of this, they'll never go back to work again. The whole job it ruined. Acme won't be able to hire a man to go aloft at ten times the usual wage. These boys are tough. They'd face anything they could see and punch, but killers who strike without warning and leave no trace—Well, you know the boys as well as I do. We're licked!"

Dolan shook his head. "We haven't even begun. Listen, Weaver, there's some kind of a tie-up be-

tween an organized racket and this bozo who can kill without even being near his victim. The boss of the mob that propositioned me was a fancy-pants named Benny. I know him. I know his mob and I know who'll take his place. That mob is the roughest outfit on record, when there's enough of them in one spot to outnumber anyone who tackles them. Local cops don't dare to pull them in because there are always reprisals. Well—those babies are tough, sure. Handy with a gat or brass knuckles. But get this—they weren't born tough, and every ironworker was. We've got twenty steel monkeys on our side. You get them out of bed, bring them down here and we'll show Benny's gang what being rough really amounts to."

Weaver's eyes lighted up in enthusiasm. "Swell, Dolan. No wonder they sent you here when everybody else failed. I'm betting this is all the work of an organized mob. They're trying to stop work on the project until they're given a cut. The boys will listen to you, Dolan. I'll get them up right now."

Dolan went over to the phone booths and called police headquarters. He got Captain Burke of the homicide detail on the wire.

"That guy Benny—who was killed over at the job. I want to know where his mob hangs out, and, cap, you might tip off the patrolmen around the section to lay low. We're cleaning up the mob."

Captain Burke cleared his throat in an embarrassed manner. "Well, Dolan, it all sounds very nice to me, but my job is to prevent bloodshed and believe me if you invade the dump where those gorillas hang out, there'll be plenty of it spilled. However—and strictly off the record—they hole up in a rat's nest known as the Gilded Canary, a dump near the river front. I might—ah—see to it that our men in the vicinity are busy with something or other. You're positive you can tackle it?"

Dolan grinned and spoke very softly over the wire. He asked other questions which Burke couldn't answer without checking records. Five minutes later Dolan addressed the group of sleepy-eyed ironworkers. They listened with enthusiasm that grew out of bounds before he was finished. Weaver hurried out to arrange transportation.

CHAPTER IV.

SECRET OF THE MANSION.

It was almost 3 a. m. when two men pushed open the door of the café and walked up to the bar. A score of hostile eyes followed them. There were, perhaps, thirty men in the place, all shifty-eyed and crafty-looking. The newcomers at the bar ordered drinks, picked up their glasses and deliberately turned around to face the silent mob of crooks.

One of the thugs arose and swaggered toward the burly men who were holding up the bar. He eyed them contemptuously.

"Out o' bounds, ain't you?" he asked derisively. "We don't like strangers here."

One of the ironworkers grinned broadly and pulled down the peak of his cap. He looked over the thug's shoulder and nodded in the direction of the door.

"Then you sure are in for a lot of grief, gorilla!" he said pleasantly. "Take a look behind you. There's plenty of company."

Everyone in the place turned toward the door. While the two men at the bar held the attention of the mob, Dolan and his crew had silently slipped inside and were lined up,

ready for action. One of the thugs saw Dolan and recognition dawned.

"It's Dynamite Dolan! Get him, boys! Get the whole damned bunch of 'em!"

But before the crooks could reach for guns, the ironworkers were distributed around the room, fighting like wild cats. Dolan vaulted across the bar, seized a bottle on his way over it and brought the weapon down on the bartender's skull, preventing him from yanking the trigger of a sawed-off shotgun. Dolan picked up the gun, ran around the bar and used the weapon as a club. Chairs and tables were already smashed. Twice a gun roared, but none of the bullets found a mark, for Dolan's men were too fast. Dolan reached the door, turned and, aiming the sawed-off shotgun high above the heads of the mob, he yanked both triggers. The hundreds of fine bits of shot peppered the bottles stacked up beind the bar. The huge mirror changed its polished surface into myriad cracks.

Dolan grinned, rubbed an aching fist and stepped out of the fight. His men could handle things from this point on, and Dolan had work to do. He hurried up the street, saw a patrolman slowly pacing his beat and looking skyward as if trying to identify some faint star. The noise of the raging battle was very plain.

The patrolman saw Dolan, grinned at him and touched the peak of his uniformed cap.

"Certainly a quiet night," he said with a grin. "Haven't heard a noise for hours. Have you?"

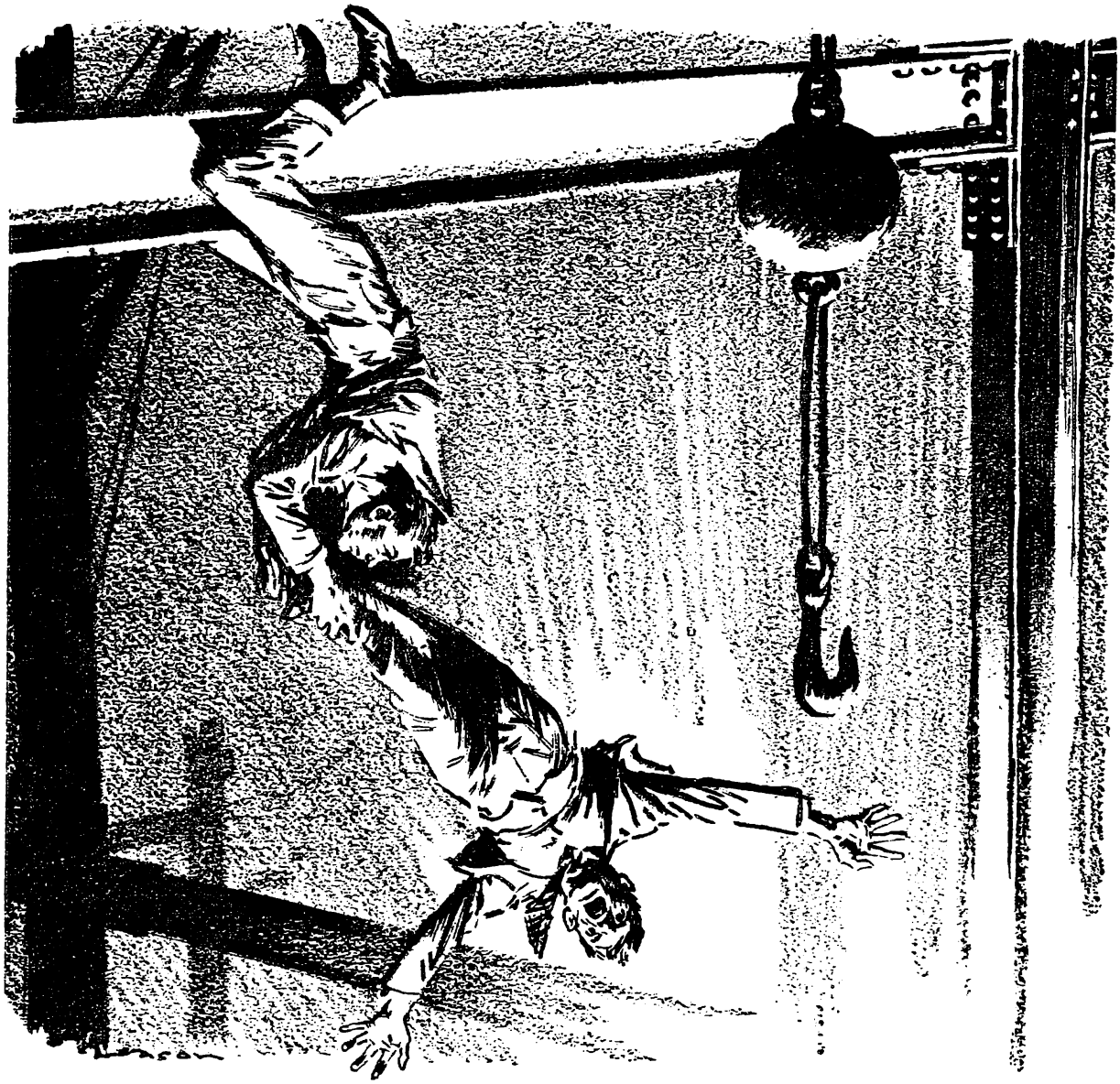
Dolan shook his head and went on. He hailed a taxi, had himself driven back to the job and paid off the driver three blocks away. He glanced at his raw knuckles and felt mighty good. There was just one more piece of business that required his attention and then—with the morning—the gaunt steel girders would be swarming with men and resounding to the rattle of rivet guns.

The mansion was in total darkness. Dolan didn't head for the front door. Instead he circled the house, stopped beside one of the tool sheds and took from it a steel hook. He tied a length of heavy rope to the end of it, crept back to the house and stood below the same open window through which the ghostly intruder seemed to have literally flown out into space. He raised the hook, tossed it gently and it fastened around the window sill. Dolan kicked off his shoes, grasped the rope and walked up the side of the house, using the rope to advance each step. He crawled through the window, took flashlight and gun from his pocket and in his stockinged feet he made no more noise than the ghost killer as he walked toward the stairway. He went down it very carefully, feeling his way before taking a step.

At the bottom of the stairs he found what he expected—a thin copper wire stretched across the hallway, ankle high, to trip anyone who might blunder into the place. Though the ghost may have seemed to possess the power of dissolving into air, he needed a man-made trap to warn him of intruders.

Something within the wall itself brought Dolan erect with a jerk. He pressed an ear against the paneling, smiled coldly and started back up the steps. At the landing he listened again, crept toward the farther end of the corridor and then he heard hoarse breathing and an impatient oath. Dolan leaned against the doorway, turned on his flash and swept the beam along the walls.

A man, kneeling on the floor in one corner, jumped up and raised a



Up there on the steel, Dolan grabbed Weaver's ankles!

gun which had been lying on the floor beside him. But he didn't squeeze the trigger, for Dolan shifted his flash so that it revealed the weapon in his own fist.

"Are you looking for something, Weaver?" Dolan asked quietly. "Something very important, maybe? It must be to bring you away from that scrap. And what's that on the floor? Looks like a fish line, with a hook. Is this your way of having fun?"

Weaver's face was black with rage. "Damn you!" he ground out. "I should have finished you off before I even started to look for it. But I know when I'm licked. Listen—you get sixty bucks a week. Throw in with me and you'll get sixty thousand dollars for two minutes' work. I'm willing to split with a right guy and one smart enough to get wise to me."

"It's in the wall, huh?" Dolan moved forward a step. "That's what you're fishing for. And I get a sixty-grand cut. You're a heel, Weaver, and they're worth no more than fifty cents a pair, tacked on at a shoemaker's. I wouldn't throw in with you if you offered me a hundred and

fifty grand—which is half of what's hidden between the walls of this house."

Weaver's eyes narrowed to slits. Suddenly he ducked and flung his gun straight at the flashlight. It hit Dolan's arm and the light fell from his hand. Before he could set himself to check Weaver, the assistant super came charging toward him. There was sheer desperation lending wings to his flight, and he sent Dolan reeling out of the way. Weaver didn't head for the steps. He raced into the same room from which he had escaped once before, crossed the floor and launched himself through the big window. Dolan was after him in a fish. He saw Weaver land in the pile of sand, get up unhurt and start running toward the street.

Dolan drew back, jumped and landed in the same sand pile. He drew the gun that he had thrust into his belt, blazed two quick shots at the fleeing Weaver and made him reverse his direction. Weaver was now heading straight toward the skeleton of the huge building. Dolan went after him. Weaver glanced over his shoulder, saw Dolan's bulky shadow in swift pursuit and with a squeal of alarm he jumped on the platform of the lift. It began to rise. Dolan made an ineffectual jump at the floor of the lift, missed it by inches and then ran toward one of the huge hoists, used in lifting girders high into the air. The hoist had a tall arm jutting up to a point six floors from the ground. Dolan climbed this arm, transferred himself to one of the girders and made his way into the center of the structure where the elevator cables were whirring.

Weaver, in the belief that Dolan was still on the ground, stopped the lift and ran along one girder to a spot where he might descend to the ground without being seen by Dolan if he was watching the elevator. Then he saw Dolan, starkly outlined against the night. Weaver ran along one girder, bent down and picked up a bucket of rivets. He began throwing the heavy missiles at Dolan.

"You won't get me," Weaver yelled. "I'll kill you first! I waited ten years to get my hands on that dough and you won't stop me."

Dolan ducked several of the flying rivets. He held his gun ready, but he wanted Weaver alive. He sent one warning shot toward the crouched killer, and the barrage of rivets stopped. Dolan moved forward, like a cat on a narrow fence. Suddenly Weaver dropped the pail of rivets, backed up hurriedly and reached a steel ladder leading to the floor above. As he started up it, Dolan grabbed his ankles. Weaver, holding onto the rungs of the ladder, had a distinct advantage. He began kicking viciously, and each kick made Dolan sway dangerously close to plunging earthward.

Then Dolan's big muscles proved their worth. He grimly hauled the fighting, squirming man down, rung by rung. Weaver, realizing he was whipped and that his end lay inevitably in the death room at the State's prison, let go of the ladder. He plunged down on top of Dolan. The big investigator lost his balance and pitched over the edge of the girder. But his powerful legs clamped around the steel support, locked there as strong as the steel itself.

Weaver, shrieking madly, dangled from Dolan's hands. Dolan had been dimly aware of activity below. Now the darkness was cut by powerful searchlights mounted on fire trucks. Police cars screeched to a halt on the street below. Dolan held on.

There wasn't anything else he could do. Weaver's weight tugged at his muscles until he felt that to save his own life he must let the killer plunge to his death.

Then the girders were alive with men. The steelworkers, with swollen faces, blackened eyes and raw knuckles, happily swarmed over the girders toward him. Strong hands pulled him up. Weaver, unable to stand from terror, was dragged between two men over to the lift. Dolan followed. Captain Burke of the homicide squad was waiting.

Dolan searched Weaver, made sure he had no means of either destroying himself or endangering anyone on the lift, and then motioned to Captain Burke.

"Put cuffs on him. Be sure they're tight. This guy has an idea he's a ghost."

The group of steelworkers were assembled below. They watched Weaver shoved into a patrol car. Dolan faced them.

"I can see by the knots on your heads that you cleaned up that mob. Good! Weaver was more than glad to watch us start out. It gave him time to return to that mansion over there and become the ghost once more. Here's the story, boys, and I want no more talk of laying off because you're afraid. A steel monkey isn't afraid of anything, understand? Weaver used to be an ironworker, like we are now. But he went crooked ten years ago. On the site of this building there used to be a bank. Weaver busted into it, used a torch on the safe door and got three hundred thousand in bills. He had to make a fast getaway because an alarm was sent in. He slipped into that mansion, dropped the money between the walls and then lit out. He was picked up for another offense, sent to prison for ten years and he got out a few months ago. But he couldn't go after his loot because the man who lived in that house was wealthy, had a lot of valuable things and kept the place guarded. Then he sold out to the construction company. The house was used as headquarters for this job, and it was to be torn down after the job was finished. Weaver had to get his loot before that happened so he joined the company and got himself a job as assistant super. When you excavated that old cemetery, he discovered a way to make all of you leave the job. He buried a tombstone with a warning inscription on it. Then he began to kill men working on the job. He did it so everyone would think one of those ghosts from the graveyard was responsible. You mugs fell for the line."

"Don't take it out on them," Captain Burke broke in. "I fell for it myself. Especially when Bob Temple was killed on that elevator with nobody anywhere near him. How did that happen?"

Dolan grinned. "Weaver set up a neat little apparatus which threw that blade, much like an old-fashioned crossbow. When Temple operated that lift, he had to stand at the controls and as the lift descended, it tripped the mechanism, sent the knife flying at Temple and —killed him. Weaver was on the ground when it happened so he had a perfect alibi. But he tried the same trick with me, and it didn't work. I heard the crossbow snap, but I didn't have the time to go back and find it. Weaver got rid of the apparatus. As an ex-con it was easy for him to get in with that mob, and he put them up to shaking us down for protection money. Then, after it

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was all over, Weaver could throw all the blame for the killings on them. He murdered the watchman, hung his body high up on the girders and turned on the flashlight so I'd go up there and be knifed coming down. Benny—that gangster—slipped in to wait for me. Instead he found Weaver, who killed him. Every spare minute in which he could safely work, Weaver was busy trying to get back his loot without actually ripping the walls down in the house. I caught him at it. He jumped out of a window, landed on a pile of sand and smoothed it out after him so I'd think he jumped and flew away. But I beat it to the hotel, got Weaver downstairs before he could change his clothes and—his trouser cuffs were full of sand. He'd forgotten that. I let him think all of us were going to tackle the mob, but I slipped back and—Weaver was there, fishing for the money."

Dolan surveyed the group of men with a challenge in his eyes. "It'll be morning pretty soon. You monkeys get some more shut-eye and be on the job at eight, you hear? This building is going up—and not even ghosts can stop it! So far as that tombstone is concerned, forget it. Remember what Bob Temple said about that stone? That a blind man could see it was as funny as it was phony?

"He meant this—Weaver buried that stone. He had somebody make it, put a sand machine on it to wear it thin to resemble great age, and then he buried it. But the guy who carved those letters forgot that in 1600 and right up for decades after that, the letter 's' was written much like an 'f.' The dope put modern letters on it. A blind man could have touched the inscription with his fingers and told that. Now scram so I can get some sleep—after Captain Burke and I go fishing—in that house."

THE END.

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COP COURAGE

By Milton Lowe

Detective Riley got the phone call he was expecting —but he didn't expect it to be the call of death!

Detective-sergeant Bob Riley, big, powerful ace of the homicide bureau, paced up and down in front of Chief Swanson's desk at headquarters like a tiger with the jitters. Worry creased his forehead and turned his lean, clean-cut features into an icy mask. Every so often he stopped abruptly, glanced at his wrist watch, then up at the wall clock.

"Easy, Bob," spoke gray-haired Swanson. "Haven't you got confidence in Mike? He's all right. He just couldn't contact us."

Moisture filmed Riley's face and his eyes hardened. "I've got all the confidence in Mike, chief." His lips tightened. "But I've also got a mean respect for Neff Jackson's fertile brain. Not hearing from Mike is a bad sign."

Chief Swanson was about to say something encouraging, but fear for Mike O'Neil had bitten him, too. He tried to interest himself in reports on his desk, while Riley again walked the floor. The phone rang, electrifyingly.

Both men, expecting a call as they had, were visibly startled. Riley recovered quickly; he lunged for the phone and cupped the receiver to his ear.

"Hello!"

"Bob? Mike O'Neil talking. I'm in Room 615 at the Crown Hotel. I called to tell you I'm checking out—permanently!"

"Mike . . . Mike!" Riley's voice was thick, harsh with dread. "Wait a second!" But the dull click of the phone at the other end was his only response.

He slammed down the phone, every fiber in him taut. Mike was checking out—permanently! Lord! It meant but one thing. Neff Jackson! The murderer was adding another victim to his string. Somehow he had tumbled to Mike O'Neil's undercover role.

Voice choked, he blurted out to Swanson what Mike had said; then, spinning on his heel, he leaped for the door. Long legs carried him swiftly down the corridor, out to the street. He sprang into his department coupé, kicked the engine to life, then sped from the curb, the siren wailing for the right of way.

The car tore downstreet, heading eastward toward the Crown Hotel. Despite the galloping of his heart, Riley handled the steering wheel like a robot; nerveless and automatic. The speedometer climbed to fifty, scaled it, went higher into the danger zone.

But Bob Riley had no thoughts of himself. His ears still rang with Mike O'Neil's final words: *"—checking out—permanently!"*

Mike was like a younger brother to the big detective. Riley had taken the young patrolman off the pay-roll detail, disguised him as tough convict who had to be transferred from one State prison to another to smash escape attempts.

For his objective, Mike had a milky, second-rate punk named Joe Tunker. It was Mike's job to get Tunker's admiration and confidence. He evaded and derided the punk and finally won Tunker's respect.

"It's working out," Mike told Riley just before they "broke" prison. "Tunker hinted he could get me tied up with Neff Jackson; that Neff could use a smart monkey like me. How's that?"

"Great, kid!" Riley quickly related the next step. "It's all set. The warden and the guards are in on it. You'll find the laundry truck at the back prison gate. In a bundle will be suits, one for you and one for Tunker. Luck, Mike."

They shook hands, then Riley added: "Careful. You're on your own. I'll be busy myself, trying to run down a female who's been knocking off small-time holdups. But I'll drop it as soon as I hear from you."

"Don't worry, you'll hear soon," Mike said.

The prison "escape" was front-page stuff. Mike O'Neil's make-believe career of crime was spread thick to arouse Neff Jackson's curi-

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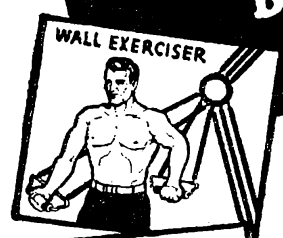

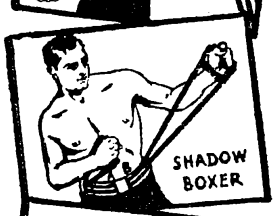

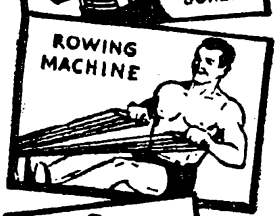

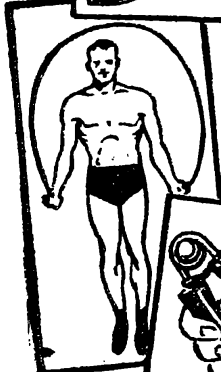

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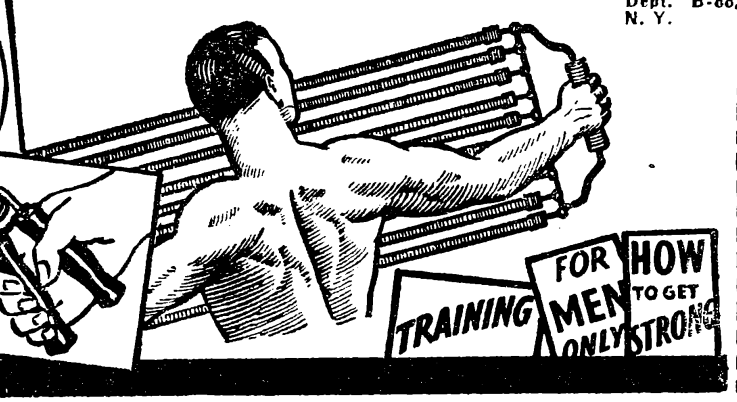

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osity. Riley had to laugh, though, when he read of the warning to citizens to be wary of meeting O'Neil; that he shot at the slightest pretext, using guns taken from the prison guards he had overpowered.

Two days passed, however, with no word from Mike. At first, Riley thought nothing of the silence. Then he became worried. Neff Jackson was nobody's dumbbell. Crafty and cunning, he already was sought for three murders. He had killed a jewelry clerk, then a police doctor and an attendant at the hospital.

In a way, Riley felt he was an instrument in the hospital killings. Tipped off that Neff Jackson was moseying around the business section, Riley hurried there in time to hear a burglar alarm. Sprinting to the jewelry store, he saw Neff retreating. The killer spotted him, whirled to pump lead!

Bullets flew, endangering the lives of hundreds of pedestrians. Riley closed in, returning slug for slug. Then Jackson tottered, knees buckling. He pitched to the walk, two bullets in his abdomen. When the detective got to him, Neff glared.

"I'll see you in hell, first, copper!" he snarled. "There ain't a hot seat made for me."

It looked as if Jackson were dead wrong. The jewelry clerk who had sounded the alarm died before the ambulance arrived. But it went away with Neff Jackson, held for the murder. The electric chair yawned for him. But the blond, light-complexioned killer had merely been marking time.

At the hospital, he somehow got his hands on a scalpel. Complaining of a pain in his stomach, he had the police doctor stoop down. The scalpel was driven into the doctor's heart! The attendant, hearing groans, rushed forward. Neff met him with the bloody blade, plunging it into the man's throat!

The attendant lived long enough to give police the killer's parting message: "Tell Riley I'll be seeing him sometime!"

Riley accepted the challenge. With other detectives he raided every haunt and hide-out known to criminals. All who were acquainted with Jackson were arrested, questioned and finally released. They gave Riley nothing to work on. Days turned into weeks, weeks into months. But the killer stayed at large.

Then Riley remembered Joe Tunker, the punk who had always been Neff's stooge. In jail for burglary, Tunker offered a good bet. Maybe Riley could get Tunker to lead young Mike O'Neil to Jackson's lair.

It appeared as if the plan had worked too well!

The coupé braked to a stop in front of the hotel. Riley bounded out, whirled through the revolving doors to the elevators. He gave the floor number to the operator, flashing his shield. The operator instantly shut the door, zoomed upward.

At the sixth floor Riley leaped out, wheeled toward the left wing. Gun gripped firmly in his right hand, he glimpsed the door numerals, finally finding 615. He twisted the knob with his free hand and banged the door wide with his foot.

Instinct, and instinct alone, caused him to drop flat to one side. The door swung inward—then was ripped from its hinges and blown to bits! A terrific blast rocked the floor, echoed through the building itself. Wood, plaster and concrete showered down upon him. Quick thinking, faster action had saved Riley from certain death!

Blood oozed from cuts on his face and hands as he scrambled up and darted into the smoke-filled room.

A small blaze was started in the single bed. He grabbed the mattress, dragged it to the paneless window and shoved it over the sill, letting it fall into the court below.

Then he turned and saw the blood-spattered form huddled in the corner. He didn't have to take a second look to realize the man was dead. Pulse climbing, fear shuttling through his brain, he sprang forward. He realized he had set off the blast by opening the door.

Kneeling, he turned the body over. A shock went through him. It wasn't Mike O'Neil! The body was that of Joe Tunker, Neff Jackson's stooge. More than that, Joe's hands and feet had been tied and a gag had been stuck into his mouth. The blast had done the rest.

But where was Mike O'Neil?

Riley spun, glanced about. Aside from the wrecked furniture and the body of Neff Jackson's stooge, there was nothing. The position of the body and the remains of the chair told Riley that the blast had flung Joe into the corner.

A faint smell of perfume hung in the air. The detective eyed Tunker speculatively. He shrugged.

"Looks as though Jackson had no further use for his stooge," Riley muttered.

He frowned, trying to figure out what lay behind the killer's action. Obviously, Jackson had rigged up the dynamite charge to serve a double purpose. He wanted to get rid of his stooge and Riley in one blowup.

The detective's jaws hardened and steel glinted in his blue eyes. Death had narrowly missed him. Had he plunged into the room right after kicking wide the door, he would have ended up alongside of Joe Tunker. Not a pleasant thought.

Getting down on his haunches, Riley studied the blast set-up. A plunger-type detonator had been used. It had been placed on the floor, so that merely opening the door would set off the charge.

Riley realized that the killer had had plenty of time to carry out his preparations. Examination of the wires was enough to bolster that idea. Had Mike been there all that time, witnessing the killer at work?

Riley let his gaze scour the room. His attention was drawn toward the radiator. Under it, balled up, was a wad of newspaper. Riley yanked it free, started to unroll it. Something dropped from the paper, clanked on the floor at Riley's feet.

He stopped, picking up the coin—a twenty-five-cent piece.

His lids narrowed and he pondered. His thoughts were interrupted by the coming of hotel men, police and firemen. Riley ordered them to touch nothing. Then, taking the manager of the hotel aside, he asked when the room had been engaged and by whom.

The manager glanced at Joe Tunker. "He took it this morning, early. I was on my way to breakfast at the time."

Riley got little help from the manager. The elevator boy said one man had come up to the sixth floor since he was on duty. He described the man. It fitted Mike O'Neil.

"When was that?" Riley demanded.

"About nine o'clock," said the boy. "But I didn't see him leave."

In fact, no one seemed to have seen Mike leave the hotel. Riley went down to the switchboard operator, checked the outgoing-call pad. Room 615 had called police head-

quarters; no other place. Riley's brow wrinkled.

How did Neff Jackson know where to go to meet his stooge and Mike? No other man had inquired about the occupant of Room 615. There was something wrong somewhere.

He started for the elevator again when the truth struck him. Whirling, he sped to his coupé at the curb. A glance at his dashboard clock told him there was still a chance to beat Jackson.

As he headed from the East Side, Riley reviewed his thoughts. The phone call to headquarters had been the clincher. It was designed to get him to the Crown Hotel and out of action. Riley didn't doubt that Mike had been forced to telephone.

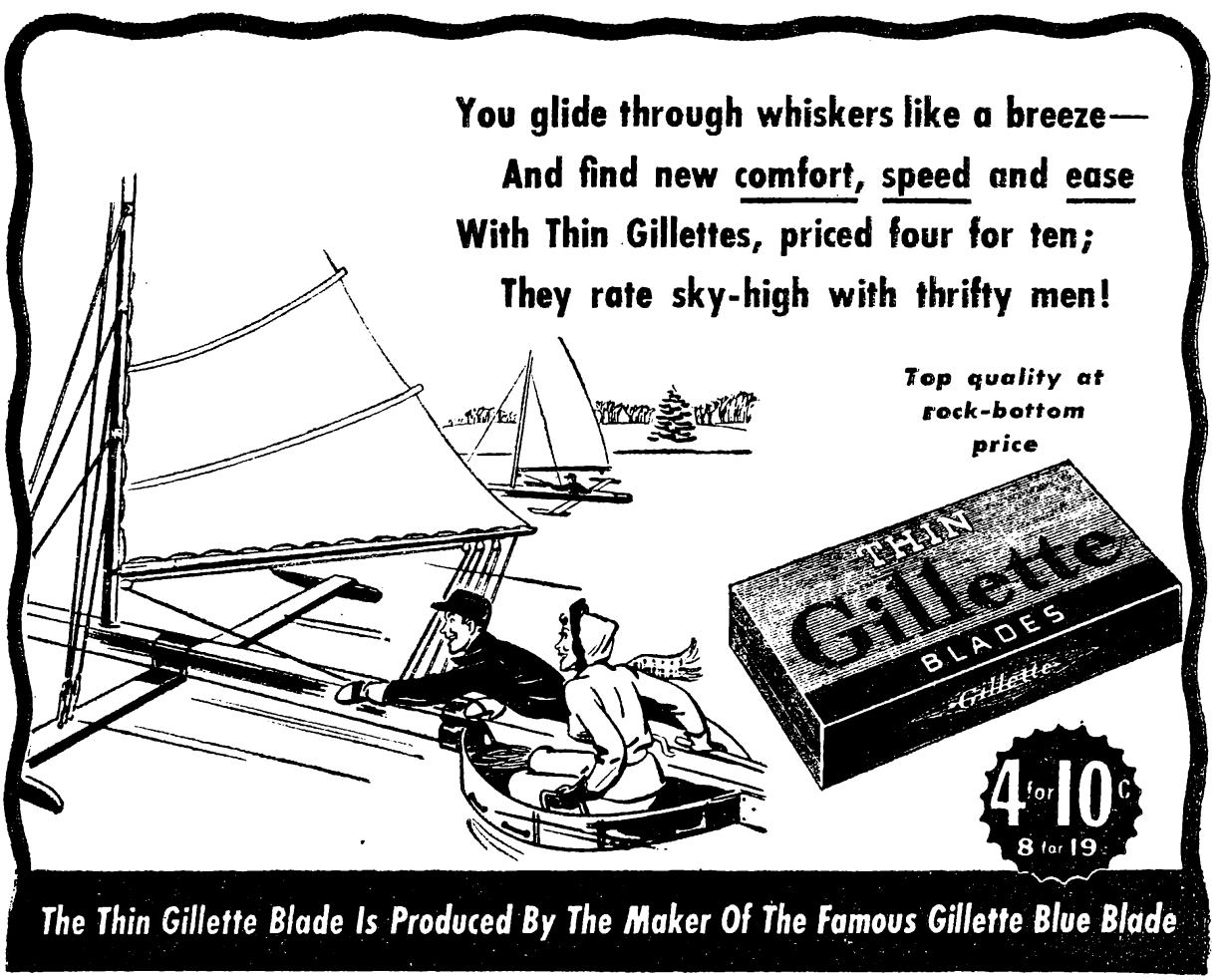
"Yes," came through Riley's clenched teeth. "Everything dovetails. While I've been hoping to get at Jackson through Tunker, Jackson himself was planning to get his hooks on some hard cash through Mike O'Neil."

Riley remembered what Joe Tunker had told Mike in jail. Jackson could "use a monkey like him." It was more than a hint. It was the McCoy.

Things were clearing rapidly. Mike O'Neil had been on regular pay-roll detail for months. Jackson, while casing some of these pay-roll deliveries, must have seen Mike on the job. Later, when the newspapers ran pictures of the "prison break," Jackson recognized him and schemed accordingly.

Unless the detective was all wrong in his deductions, a pay-roll stick-up was in the offing!

Jackson would use Mike as a foil and a shield. A foil to trick the unsuspecting men guarding the pay-roll money; a human shield against flying bullets. Either way, Mike was in a tough spot!



Riley's foot grew leaden on the gas pedal. The coupé answered with greater speed, its siren shrieking in desperation.

At the Second National Trust Co., the teller in Cage A-E lifted the grillework high enough to shove through a weighty sack to a slim, well-dressed young man with glasses. The man thanked him, deposited the money sack in a leather brief case, locked it securely, then nodded to the uniformed patrolman who was acting as guard detail.

"This is the largest pay roll yet," whispered the slim man. "Business is starting to boom for us. And it's about time."

He was talking about the Benson Metalwork Co., one of the first outfits to receive a defense order from the government. As general manager he knew that hundreds of men had been rehired in the past few months, increasing the pay roll from six thousand to ten thousand dollars per week.

With the patrolman at his side, he left the bank, started down the block to his parked auto. He didn't know why he suddenly felt nervous. He tried to reason that the extra money was responsible for his jitters. The cop near him was busy raking the street with his eyes.

"Well," said the cop, "if that ain't Mike O'Neil. And look what's hanging onto him."

The pay-roll carrier looked ahead. "Not bad—not bad at all. Mike's been promoted to plain-clothes evidently. He seems embarrassed."

The cop grinned. "Let's needle him about the dame."

They saw the fashionably dressed girl speak earnestly into Mike O'Neil's ear. A dotted veil, falling down from the brim of her hat, obscured most of her face. Mike appeared to hesitate. The girl motioned with her muff.

"Hi, Mike," called the patrolman, approaching with the manager.

They were near the parked car from which Mike and his companion had emerged. The cop couldn't understand why Mike's eyes darted at the girl, at the muff, at him. Then something about the girl froze the patrolman.

A man's icy voice came from beneath the veil.

"Stand, you two! A wrong move and I'll fill you with lead." The left arm was freed from Mike. "Hand over that dough—fast!"

Fear swelled in the manager's eyes. He started to obey.

Mike O'Neil suddenly became a pin wheel of action. His right fist jutted out, landed on the gunman's shoulder. He hurled himself forward, swinging both arms. The muff slanted at him, then puffed out a stab of fire and smoke! Mike fell, a red dot on his forehead.

The patrolman yanked out his Positive. But he never got the chance to use it. The muff belched again and again. The cop backed off, death glazing his eyes.

Quickly, the killer lunged at the manager, who was too paralyzed to budge. The brief case was ripped out of his hand. Forgetting fear, the manager snatched for the pay roll.

More fire and smoke poured from the gun hidden in the muff. Two slugs drilled through the manager's body. He doubled up and pitched to the sidewalk.

The disguised gunman leaped into his sedan, zoomed away in a billow of exhaust vapor. So swiftly had everything occurred that passers-by were just becoming aware of their peril. Some screamed; others yelled. One man pointed wildly to

the sedan as it careened around the corner, into a side street and out of sight.

Bob Riley was four blocks from the scene. The staccato gun reports barely reached him, but they were loud enough to chill his blood.

One look at the men lying on the walk informed him he had been too late. The man pointing in the direction of the fleeing sedan sent him racing into the side street, rubber burning the pavement.

He interpreted the looks of amazement on the faces of the people in the street. The killer had turned right at the next intersection, heading for the subway station a few blocks away.

Sure enough, a sedan, one door wide, stood at the entrance to the kiosk. Piling out of his coupé, Riley hopped down the stairs, gun drawn. As he reached the platform a train was pulling out.

Eyes ablaze, feeling sick at heart, he returned to the scene of the shooting. Precinct police were already milling around. Only the slim manager was alive.

"We thought Mike had a girl with him," he gasped to Riley. "Tall, dark-haired—"

"Sounds like that woman stick-up artist," said Sergeant Miller to Riley.

"Woman, my eye," rasped the detective. "It's Neff Jackson, dressed up."

He went to Mike O'Neil's body, a vow forming on his lips. He wouldn't rest until Jackson paid for his crimes. Clever, Neff had done his dirty work behind a woman's skirts. Those small holdups were explained perfectly, now.

He rummaged through Mike's pockets. In the trouser hip pocket, Riley found a bent pasteboard. He read the ironic words printed on it.

PLEASE DO NOT DISTURB

For fully a half-minute its meaning didn't strike Riley. He merely stared at it. Then his brain clicked. His fist closed, crumpling the pasteboard in it. Abruptly, he stuffed it in his coat pocket.

He was remembering the odor of perfume in Room 615 at the hotel; also, that no one but Mike O'Neil was seen to enter that room; that Neff Jackson knew exactly where to find Joe Tunker and Mike. The pieces began to fall into a definite pattern.

Blond, tall, Neff Jackson could easily disguise himself as a girl. Some rouge, powder and lipstick would do the job neatly.

Riley's lips curled. No wonder he had not been able to locate Jackson's hide-out! What Jackson had been doing was fantastically clever. But the evidence Mike O'Neil gave, even in death, was too overwhelming to be denied.

Riley started for his coupé, his face grim with intention. Behind him Sergeant Miller sang out:

"The chief's coming. Where you going?"

"To get Neff Jackson!" Riley snapped.

Miller yelled: "Wait. I'll go—"

But Riley wasn't waiting. This was a job he had to do himself, and he meant to do it alone. He owed it to Mike O'Neil.

It was almost dark when Riley stepped from his coupé and walked with measured stride to the rear entrance of the big building. A

wizened, stoop-shouldered watchman lolled not far from the time clock.

Riley flashed his badge, asked: "Have any of the chambermaids come in within the last hour?"

The watchman nodded slowly. "Mabel Neffson punched in about twenty minutes ago. Anything wrong?"

"I'd like to see her. What room is she in? No, don't call her. I'll go up."

"You'll find her in Room 1201. All the help live on the twelfth floor."

Riley got into the automatic service elevator, pressed Button 12. On the way up he took out his Police Special, assured himself it was in good working order, then put it in the pocket of his topcoat.

When the elevator door slid open on the twelfth floor, Riley thumbed the button which would take it to the basement again. Every muscle in him was taut as he moved noiselessly along the carpeted hall to the room at the extreme end.

He rapped on the door, listened. No sound came from inside. He knocked a second time. Then he turned the knob. The door opened noiselessly. Riley inhaled. The same odor of perfume he noticed in Room 615 could be detected there.

Gun palmed, he entered. Shades were drawn, darkening the room entirely. Riley flicked on the switch, blinked once. A bed, a bureau laden with cosmetics and a chair were the only furnishings. On the chair were woman's undergarments.

Riley's smile was acid.

He strode to the closet, jerked wide the door. Dresses, slips, women's shoes and hats were neatly arrayed inside. Also a cardboard box—empty. Bob's pulse quickened. The box would have accommodated a suit of men's clothes.

"I've been expecting you, Riley," said a glacial voice. The tongue of the door lock snapped into place, sounding like the click of a gun's hammer going back. "And I'm ready to take care of you."

Riley turned, saw the snout of an automatic leveled at him. Holding the gun was Neff Jackson, minus his woman disguise. He wore a dark suit which emphasized his light complexion. A leer twisted his mouth; his pale-blue eyes were murky. He motioned for Riley to lift his arms, then approached warily and took the Police Special.

"I don't know how you tailed me," Jackson muttered, "but it makes no difference. I'm lamming—"

The detective laughed outright. "The cops surrounding the hotel have something to say about that."

Jackson's lids dipped a little, the leer vanishing from his lips. "Don't kid me, Riley." His voice lacked confidence. "Besides, any cops downstairs will be busy with your remains in a couple of minutes."

Riley felt a frigid draft whip up his spine. His remains! He didn't have to wonder what Jackson had in mind. The killer was motioning to the window.

"Get going—out on that ledge. You'll feel like an angel on your trip down!"

The detective sucked in a breath. "I'll take mine straight!" he said curtly, nodding at the automatic that Jackson held.

"I'm giving the orders, copper," growled the killer. "The window—fast!"

Riley shrugged as if in resignation. He had to move between the bed and the bureau to reach the window sill. His body half turned toward Jackson, he obeyed the command. But his mind was racing.

"Lift the sash," barked Jackson.

Almost reluctantly, Riley lowered his arms, grasped the sash handles and raised the window. He glanced at the killer, noticed the wild gleam in the man's eyes. Jackson waved impatiently for Riley to climb out onto the narrow ledge.

Hesitatingly, the detective swung one leg over the sill. He had to support himself on the bureau. For a split instant, the killer's gaze shifted to the detective's legs.

That was enough for Riley. His right hand closed on a small box. His arm snaked out into a half circle. The contents of the box sprayed out like fog, enveloping Jackson.

The killer coughed, tried to see through the haze of fine face powder. He pumped his gun! Plaster splattered near Riley's head. Then he was in action.

He catapulted himself at Jackson, seized the gun hand, wrenched with all his strength. The gun roared. A slug furrowed Riley's shoulder. He had to let go.

Jackson fell back but recovered at once; he started to point the gun. Riley leaped at him and hooked hard with his left. Jackson took the wallop on the side of the head. It ruined his aim, but he got set to fire again.

Riley slammed in with an uppercut, grabbed the wrist of Jackson's gun hand, forced it back. The killer brought up his knee, digging it into Riley's groin. Pain lanced through the detective and he doubled up.

A snarl of triumph broke from Jackson. He aimed his gun, fought to steady his arm. But the fine powder had filtered through his eyelashes was bothering him. He stepped closer to Riley, not wanting to miss this time.

Riley clamped his teeth together, ignored the agony branching out

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from his midsection. The gun in the killer's hand was now steady, rigid.

Facing death was nothing new to the big detective. More than once he had hung at the brink of eternity. But never had it seemed as positive as at that moment.

Then his iron will to live exerted itself. If he was to die, it would be with the full knowledge that he had done his utmost.

Forgotten was the pain inside him. His muscles seemed to coil like springs as he crouched there. Then, as the killer's finger whitened on the trigger and death came that much closer, Riley sprang!

The automatic belched! Fire ate through Riley's shoulder, half twisting him in midair. But the impetus of his spring carried him at Jackson. The killer tried to retreat; to shoot again.

Riley landed against him, bowling him over. They hit the floor together. Jackson cursed and kicked viciously.

The detective clouted him with a right that traveled less than six inches. It dug into Jackson's jaw, made his head bob. The killer got to his knees, slashed down with the gun. It scraped along Riley's face and spent itself on his shoulder.

Beyond feeling pain, the detective forced himself up. He got his hands on the gun, fastened on it like talons. He tore it out of Jackson's grasp, flung it away.

Like a mighty juggernaut, Riley rose, arm battering out. The blows landed full in Jackson's upturned face.

After the third time, the punches sounded spongy. Jackson's complexion was beet-red, the area around his eyes swollen. Blood streaked down from bloated lips. He started to sag. Bob Riley measured him for an uppercut.

"This is for Mike O'Neil!"

Then he let go. The killer came off the floor, stayed suspended a full second, then dropped.

Wearily, Riley went to the wall phone, jiggled it. An excited switchboard operator plugged in at once. "Say," she cried, "what's going on up there?"

Riley said: "Grooming a candidate for the electric chair. Get Chief Swanson up here with a patrol wagon and an ambulance. The wagon for Neff Jackson, the ambulance for Detective Riley—what's left of him."

He put the receiver on the hook as a gurgle of astonishment filtered up from the switchboard.

Half an hour later, Chief Swanson watched a police surgeon extract a bullet from Riley's shoulder. Not far from them, handcuffed to a pair of husky cops, stood Jackson, glowering through puffed black-and-blue eyes.

"Mark that slug Exhibit 1," said Riley as iodine was dabbed into the wound. He winced. "It'll match slugs in Jackson's victims."

"It won't be necessary," said the chief. He patted a leather brief case. "The pay roll here will be evidence aplenty. But, Bob, how'd you figure out where to find Jackson and know that he and the woman bandit were one and the same person?"

Riley cleared his throat.

"That perfume he doused himself with. I got my first whiff in Room 615, but not until Sergeant Miller told me about the stick-up did I link up Jackson."

"Yes," cut in Swanson, "about the pay-roll stick-up. You almost got there in time to prevent it."

Riley shook his head sadly, told about the quarter piece he had found rolled up in newspaper. He explained how he tried to figure what Mike O'Neil meant to convey.

"I tried a few different ways of interpreting what the coin and rolled-up paper meant. Then I remembered Mike used to be detailed to guard pay rolls. It gave me my answer. I phoned his former precinct and got the information that sent me to the bank."

He moistened his lips and cleared his throat. "I was too late, but I found this pasteboard in Mike's pocket, 'PLEASE DO NOT DISTURB.' It's the kind you hang out on hotel doorknobs to keep the maid from bothering you. That was the final tip-off. I checked back—the woman bandit, Mike being forced to go along with Neff Jackson, and the fact that Joe Tunker came to this hotel—it all summed up to one thing: If Neff Jackson was the lady bandit he could easily have acted as hotel chambermaid. And that would have given him plenty of chance to rig up the detonator for the explosion in Room 615."

Riley got up. "When I got back to the hotel, the watchman downstairs said a maid, named Mabel Neffson, came in twenty minutes before me. I knew I was right."

The detective crossed to the cringing killer.

"You were pretty smart, Jackson, hiding your identity behind perfume, powder, rouge and lipstick. But in the end, they tripped you up—especially the powder.

"Take him away, boys, before I save the State the price of an execution!"

THE END.

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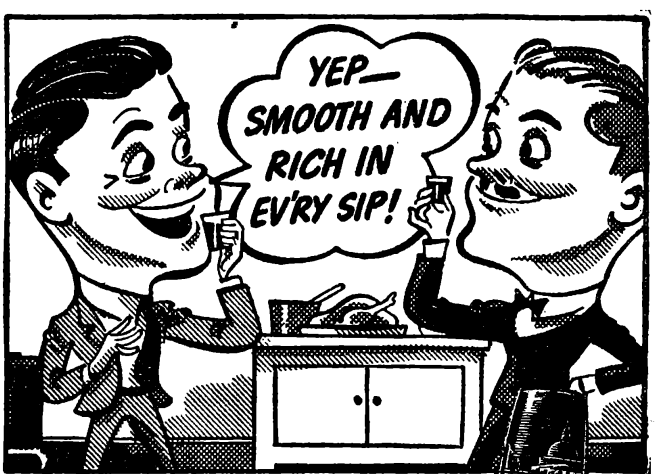

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COPS DON'T SQUARE MURDER

By John Jay Chichester

MacNary's boyhood friend came to him with a plea to break his frame for murder. Was it more important for this cop to save his friend or to trap a killer?

"Mac, I'm in a spot—the toughest spot there is. You've got to help me, Mac. You've got to pull me out of it."

Rick Hale's words pounded through my head as I ducked into the shabby bar and grill off Lincoln Square. I found him huddled in a little booth at the far end of the long bar. He was on the ragged

edge. His hands were twitching uncontrollably as he leaned across the table, and his eyes were tear-stained and wide with fear. He was a nervous wreck.

He didn't give me chance to ask the questions.

He said, "Mac"—his voice was a thick, muffled whisper—"Mac, I'm going to be arrested for murder! Unless there's something you can do, I'm as good as in the chair right now."

I smelled a fix and I felt the burn crawl into my face.

"I'm a cop," I snapped; "not a fix. You've come to the wrong guy. What you need is a lawyer."

Rick Hale swallowed the rye left in his glass to wash the dryness out of his throat. The glass clicked against his teeth and some of the liquor spilled down his quivering chin.

"I know that, Mac," he said. "I'm not asking you to cover up anything. Anybody who knows you would be a damn fool to ask you to do that. But I didn't kill this guy. I want you to find out the truth. You're a smart detective; you can do it if"—a low groan of desperation spaced his words—"if anyone can."

I watched him as he tried to light a cigarette with trembling hands. I thought: *Watch your step, Mac; maybe Rick Hale's taking you for a ride. You owe Rick something—sure! But a cop doesn't pay his debts by squaring murder.*

I said: "All right, Rick. Let's have it. Who are you supposed to have bumped off?"

"Paul Endicott, a retired stock broker. Dead—in my apartment. Killed with my gun!"

"With *your* gun?"

"It must have been my gun," he answered despairingly. "A .38 automatic; it's gone from the drawer where I've always kept it. You see—I'm coming clean all the way with you, Mac."

"Yeah," I said, "I can see that." I paused. "Your gun, eh? That's not so good. You said something about the chair. There's got to be a motive before they can hang first-degree murder on you. Did you have any reason for wanting this guy, Endicott, out of the way?"

"That's another part that makes it tough. Endicott had a young wife. He was pretty old and he was mean as hell to her. Mona Endicott and I—well, we've been seeing a lot of each other. There's some gossip around, and somebody might try to make a motive out of that."

"Yeah, they might. The D. A. could probably get a pretty good motive out of that. But let's stick to what happened tonight."

"I've got a bachelor apartment right around the corner," Rick went on. "It's on the top floor—a walk up. I'd run out of liquor and went downstairs to get some rye. Maybe I left the door to the apartment open behind me; I can't remember that.

"But it was closed and locked when I came back. I had to use my key. As I went in, there was a shot—a shot and some kind of crashing noise. That might have been a table being knocked over: there was a metal lamp on it.

"I found Paul Endicott in my bedroom. He was sprawled out on the floor with a bullet in his head. He was dead!"

"Where was the gun?" I cut in.

Rick ran his tongue over dry lips.

"There wasn't any gun!" He almost shouted it. "That's why it's so hard to believe."

"So there wasn't any gun. Maybe Endicott swallowed it?"

"No, Mac," he said hopelessly. "It was murder. Somebody followed him to my apartment and shot him. It had to be that way. *I* didn't do it!"

"Then there must be two exits to your apartment," I said.

"No—only one. I don't see how anyone could have gotten away without my seeing or hearing him. That's why it all seems so utterly impossible. And the killer wasn't hiding in the flat; I searched the place thoroughly. He simply vanished!"

It sounded screwy. Experience had taught me that there are a lot of imaginative people in the world that lie with ridiculous elaboration, seeming to believe that the very impossibility of their tale will make it sound convincing.

Still, the truth is not always convincing. I tried to be patient. I couldn't forget that I owed Rick Hale a debt.

"How about the fire escape, Rick?"

He shook his head.

"No one could—" he started to say; then: "Wait! There is something I hadn't thought of—the coping."

"Coping?"

"The only way a fellow could possibly reach the fire escape from my apartment is to go outside into the public hall. But there is a wide stone ledge that runs underneath my windows. For a man agile enough and with nerve, it would be simple to creep along it from the bedroom window to the fire escape."

That was an angle, I thought. It was the first thing he had said that made any sense. I jumped to my feet.

"All right," I snapped. "We'll look into this. But I won't promise you anything. Either you're telling the truth, or you're lying like hell. On that basis, let's go."

We crossed Lincoln Square and headed over Sixty-sixth Street through the pouring rain. We didn't say much on the way over to Rick's apartment. I didn't want to talk. I wanted to think.

Rick and I had been kids together. We started life together down on Oliver Street. We started—but it had stopped right there. Once, Rick Hale had saved my life; that was my debt of gratitude.

After high school, our paths had separated. Rick, always crazy about show business, had drifted in and out of New York with various theatrical companies. Sometimes he got a part on Broadway, usually small bits. Maybe he just missed being a good actor, but his greatest bid to fame was getting mixed up in a couple of women scandals. Women usually liked him—for a while, anyhow.

I pulled a cigarette from my pocket and handed one to Rick.

I said: "If you're innocent of this kill, the worst thing you could have done was leave the scene of the crime."

Rick nodded. "I know, but a man's mind doesn't work right when he finds himself in a spot like that. All sorts of crazy ideas get inside his head."

"They'll say the reason you lammed was to have a chance to get rid of the gun." I lighted my cigarette. I said: "Maybe I've got the same idea, myself."

Rick didn't say anything to that. His hands trembled as he bent over the match I was holding for him.

Then he said: "I guess I can't really blame you, Mac. I'm not asking for anything except a fair break. Just do the best you can for me—for old time's sake. If my word of honor is worth anything to you, I *didn't* kill Paul Endicott!"

"When a guy's in a murder spot, his word of honor isn't worth a damn!"

We had reached the old four-story brownstone that housed Rick's apartment. Two police cars were parked across the street.

We climbed the stairs to the top floor. A cop in uniform was standing outside the door to Rick Hale's apartment talking to a man in coveralls and a denim shirt. The man was obviously the superintendent. He turned and spotted Hale, then shouted:

"That's him, officer. That's the guy who rents this apartment. I saw him running down the stairs right after the murder."

I didn't know the precinct cop. I flashed my shield.

"Homicide squad," I said. "Hale's my prisoner. We're going in there."

The uniformed man opened the door and we went through a small foyer and into the living room.

Voices came from the bedroom beyond.

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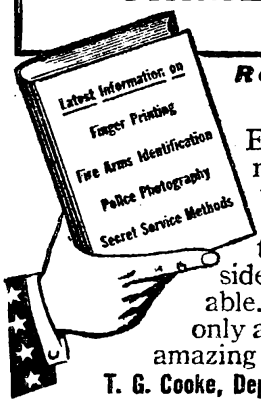

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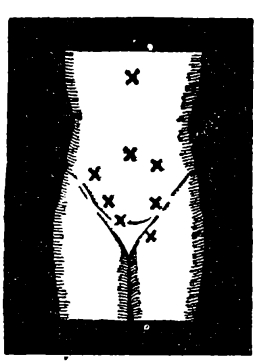

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"Come on," I said. We went in there.

Dr. Wendall, the police medical examiner, and Detective Hoadley, of the local precinct, were in the bedroom with the dead man.

"You're a little late," Hoadley said sarcastically. "This is one case the precinct has been able to clean up without the help of the master-mind from headquarters."

"All except making the arrest," I said. I walked over to where the dead man lay.

"We'll make it," Hoadley exploded. "A guy by the name of Hale pulled this kill. He's a tenant in this apartment; the superintendent of the building saw him taking a lam right after the blast."

I didn't bother to explain that I already had Rick Hale in custody. That could wait. I looked down at the dead man.

Paul Endicott lay near the foot of the bed. He wasn't very nice to look at. A mask of blood, crusting to a reddish brown, covered his face. The collar of an Irish tweed topcoat was twisted askew across his narrow shoulders, as if there had been some kind of a struggle.

The dead man was almost unbelievably emaciated; his body seemed to have no flesh on it at all. One trouser leg was pulled up to the knee, and it appeared that a shin bone as fragile-looking as that would snap under its own weight.

Dr. Wendall had finished his job. He stood erect from his kneeling position on the floor.

"The man who did this job," he said, "used damn poor judgment. If he could have waited another few weeks, Endicott would have died of natural causes. Medically speaking, he was almost a walking corpse—pernicious anemia, diabetes, and Heaven knows how many other complications."

"What was the caliber of the bullet?" I meant the question for the doctor, but it was Detective Hoadley who answered.

"That's easy." Hoadley fished into his pocket. "Endicott was killed with a .38 automatic. I picked up this empty shell from the floor beside the body. And there's nearly a full box of cartridges to match in the top drawer of that bureau. The gun belonged to this guy, Hale; it's missing and so is Hale. I guess maybe he figures on snuffing himself out if the chase gets too hot."

I didn't say anything. I let my eyes rove over the room, taking in all the details. The dead man's hat was on the bed; the crown of it was crushed, as if someone had sat down on it. A small table was overturned and the rug kicked up. Evidently, frail as he was, Endicott had put up a fight to defend himself.

I walked over to the window. It was closed but unlocked. I pushed it open and the metal weights inside the casing drummed loudly and the pulley wheels that carried the cord squeaked from lack of oil.

"Was the window open or closed when you saw it?" I asked Rick.

"Closed," he answered. "I see what you mean, Mac. It makes a hell of a racket. I'd have heard it and a man running away from a murder wouldn't have taken time to close a window behind him."

Detective Hoadley is a slow thinker. I was surprised that Rick's presence with me had edged into that two-bit mind of his as quickly as it did. He frowned heavily as he stared at Rick.

"Hey, MacNary, who is this guy?" he growled.

I didn't bother to answer him. I stuck my head out the window and looked along the stone coping. It was, as Rick had suggested, wide enough for a sure-footed man with a clear head for heights to have edged his way to the fire escape.

Only nobody had!

A thick coating of dust covered the stone projection, and the dust was undisturbed. I stepped back from the window and pulled down the sash.

"No good, Rick," I told him. "There'd have been the marks of the killer's shoes had he gone that way. And that seems to be your last out."

Rick Hale's throat worked and his fingers clawed at his collar as if it were suddenly choking him. He seemed to go completely to pieces and his voice was hoarse as he screamed:

"I didn't do it, Mac! With God as my witness, I didn't kill this man. The answer is here somewhere—if you can find it. You've got to find it! They'll burn me if you don't. And you can't let them do that, Mac. You can't! Did I let you die the day you crashed through the ice and I risked my life to dive under and drag you out?"

I shoved my hands in my pockets and rocked back and forth on my heels. I thought he would get around to pulling that. I didn't give a damn if he had saved my whole family with a couple of in-laws thrown in; I wasn't going to fix—

Hoadley shouted: "Who is this guy?"

"It's no secret," I told him. "He's Rick Hale, the guy you're looking for to hang this croak on. He surrendered voluntarily; says he didn't do it."

I could see the tight smile spread around Hoadley's mouth. He thought he had something. "And it's Rick and Mac between the two

of you, eh? All nice and chummy, eh? I wouldn't be surprised if you've got it all fixed up between the two of you."

I thought of a lot of things right then. Things like a red, bulbous nose splashed over a guy's face, and something about the sound of teeth crunching beneath the heel of a Size 12 shoe. But I didn't take my clenched fists from my pockets.

I said: "One more crack like that, Hoadley, and I'll take you apart, piece at a time."

Hoadley shrugged his shoulders. "Any place, any time, Lieutenant MacNary—except now. We've got a murder to solve. I think I'll start sweating this guy." He turned to Rick. "You might be too easy on him."

I let it ride and stepped back as Hoadley went to work on Rick Hale in his usual roaring, brow-beating manner.

Rick told the same fantastic and apparently impossible story. Listening to it for the second time, I couldn't blame the precinct dick for getting purple with rage when Rick stubbornly stuck to the same identical facts, detail for detail, with not the slightest variation, over and over again. The only difference was that he was getting himself in deeper as far as the motive was concerned. He admitted, under pressure, that Paul Endicott had heard rumors about his wife's indescretions.

"I guess he was going to raise a lot of hell about Mona and me," Rick explained. "He knew that he was a pretty sick man and that he didn't have much longer to live. So he was going to file suit for divorce and fix it so Mona couldn't claim any property rights as his widow."

I listened to the story and I thought: *The damn fool is sitting himself right in the hot seat. He's turning on the switch!* Then another thought crossed my mind. Rick Hale was no dumbbell. He'd always been clever—a quick, fast thinker. I didn't think he would lay himself wide open like this. Disposing of the gun, then carelessly leaving the box of cartridges was too stupid for any guy with a dime's worth of brains. And telling a story which he admitted he didn't expect anybody to swallow—

Hell! It just didn't make sense, that's all.

I began to wonder if, after all, Rick Hale was telling the truth. The thought was disturbing and my mind was filling with so many questions that nothing seemed to make sense, now. I wouldn't know an angle if I had one.

Slowly, very slowly, I let my eyes move over the bedroom, literally covering the place an inch at a time.

I tried to answer why Endicott had been in Hale's bedroom. Why had the murder happened here? I couldn't find the answer. Not right away.

Maybe Endicott's wife was here, too, when the old guy got blasted, I thought. *Maybe she did it. Rick's probably nuts about the babe and is trying to cover her up.*

I had something there. I'd play that angle.

Then my gaze stopped near the bed; there were streaks on the freshly waxed floor. Apparently, the feet of the bed had been dragged back and forth.

I turned to Rick. "When did you have this floor polished?" I asked.

"Day before yesterday," he said. "Why?"

"When did you move the bed?"

He looked puzzled. "I never move it. The thing weighs a ton."

"Well, somebody moved it!" I snapped. "And it's going to be moved again, right now!"

I moved it. Rick was right; it weighed plenty. As I got it away from the wall, my toe kicked against something and skidded it across the floor. Dr. Wendall stooped down and picked it up—a piece of black metal.

"Looks like the corner broken off of something." He was studying it.

"From that," I said. I pointed to a hot-air register in the floor against the wall. The cast-iron cover had a piece broken from the corner.

"That's where Hale ditched the gun," Hoadley roared. "I took it for granted that this was a steam-heated apartment."

"All these old houses used to be hot-air heated," Dr. Wendall explained. "When they were remodeled, the air pipes weren't always torn out."

I was lifting the cover of the hot-air outlet. Then I rayed the beam of my flash down into the dark opening. Hoadley was looking over my shoulder.

"I was right," he growled. "There's the gun. That wasn't very smart."

"The gun and something else," I said. I lay flat on the floor so my arm would reach into the pipe far enough, and brought up the missing .38 automatic in my hand. The automatic and the "something else."

Rick Hale strained his body forward, a look of uncomprehending amazement on his face.

"What . . . what's that?" he stammered.

Hoadley was staring at the gun. "What the hell—"

Dr. Wendall strode over from the other side of the room.

To the trigger guard of the automatic was tied a pair of strings. At

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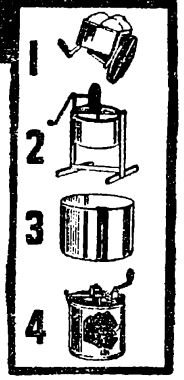

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the end of one was tied a sash weight, and the second string was tied to a stick about seven inches long.

Dr. Wendall seemed to be the first to grasp the significance of the puzzling arrangement.

"Well, I'll be eternally confounded!" he breathed. "Endicott committed suicide!"

Hoadley bristled belligerently. "What do you mean, suicide?" he thundered.

"Clever—damned clever!" The doctor's voice rushed on to an excited pitch. "Don't you see how it was done? The cover of that hot-air register; the man lies on the floor with the gun in his hand; he pulls the trigger— One string, with the weight on it, is down the pipe. The weight is heavy enough to jerk the gun out of his hand, slide it over the floor and down the register. Then the weight of the gun is heavy enough to pull the second string and to jerk in the stick with which the cover was propped open. I guess Endicott figured on the gun dropping down out of sight. A lucky thing for the lad here that it didn't."

Hoadley still couldn't get it through his thick skull. He pulled at the lobe of his ear and said:

"But why all the hocus-pocus to shoot yourself?"

Dr. Wendall gestured impatiently. "Can't you see, man? Endicott was practically a dead man. He knew there probably wouldn't be time for him to divorce his wife. He knew she was running around with Hale and he wanted—"

"Revenge against me!" Rick Hale broke in. "He . . . he must have waited until he saw me go out of my flat; then he went in. He had it all figured out in advance. That's why he waited until he heard me opening the door, so he could sew me up so tight no one would ever believe the truth."

He dropped down in a chair, trembling with relief; knowing how close he had come to a perfect murder frame.

"Like hell that's the way it was," Detective Hoadley roared. "This whole business is a plant, fixed up between Hale and MacNary to keep Hale from going to the chair."

I didn't pay any attention to the crack this time. I was busy trying to find something that was pressing through the cleverness of this thing;

something that told me that it wasn't as perfect as it had been planned.

I measured, with my eye, the piece of string that ran from the gun to the stick. Then I said:

"Yes, Lieutenant Hoadley is right. It *is* a plant—but not my frame. I don't square murder. Rick Hale thought it up all by himself and tried to use me for a sucker."

Rick jumped to his feet; he grabbed my arm, frantically tugging at the sleeve.

"What's this, Mac?" he cried. "You can't turn on me like this, after what you owe me. If you find Endicott's fingerprints on that gun now—"

"Sure!" I said. "Sure, we'll find them. You couldn't cook up a swell scheme like this and forget such a small detail like fingerprints. We'll find them because you put them there after you killed Endicott; you put them there with his dead hand."

"Mac, you're all wrong. You're trying to send an innocent man—"

I brushed him away and straightened my coat. "Just to make it short," I said, "I'll show you where you slipped."

I lowered the weight into the register and propped up the cover. Then I held the gun and pretended to pull the trigger, and then let the weapon slip from my fingers.

The weight slid it across the floor and dragged it down into the open-

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ing. As the gun vanished from sight, the second string was pulled along with it.

Then the second string stopped moving—with the stick still in place and the cover of the register still propped open.

I touched the string with my finger. A bare two or three inches of slack remained.

"The second string," I said, "is just that much too long to do what it was expected to do. Rick Hale's mistake was dropping the whole thing down the pipe without going through an actual demonstration.

"He didn't take into consideration that these hot-air pipes sometimes have obstructions. Or maybe he did know about the obstruction and wanted the gun to be found when the cover of the register was opened. But he made a mistake in his calculations—a mistake of just three inches."

Rick Hale rocked on his feet like a drunken man. He looked as if he were going to faint. His knees doubled in under him and he fell limply against my side. I held him up.

Then he jerked away—with my police regulation revolver in his fist. It all had been an act.

"Keep back," he snarled. "I'm going out of here, and I'll plug the first guy that tries to stop me!"

Detective Hoadley—no matter what else I thought of him—had guts. His hand raced to his hip. The room was filled with the shaking thunder of two quick explosions!

Rick Hale's body pitched forward—and he wasn't acting this time. A gasp and a choking cough brought a gush of blood through his lips. My gun slipped through his hands without having been fired.

"Thanks," he gasped. "That was what I was trying to make you do. Quicker and better . . . than electric chair. Saves trouble . . . for everybody." He lay still for a moment and there was a chilling silence. Then he propped up on one elbow and said to me: "I asked you to find out the truth, Mac—and you did. I got what I asked for . . . hadn't figured that way. Three inches too long . . . second string. Almost . . . perfect."

I leaned down. "Tell me, Rick," I said, "why did you kill him. The man was going to die. Couldn't you and the girl wait?"

Rick Hale was finding it hard to speak.

"Money, Mac," he said. "Mona Endicott . . . crazy about me. Could twist her around my finger. Anything she had . . . mine. She was going to get a million when he died, only—"

There were longer gasps between Rick's dying words.

"Somebody tipped him off about me. He must have watched till I went out . . . got into my apartment. I came back . . . found him with . . . letters she had written me. He said . . . going to cut Mona off without a penny. So I gambled . . . million dollars—I lost . . . damn string three inches too long!"

Dr. Wendall bent down over Rick a moment, then stepped back with a gesture.

"The quickest post mortem on record," he said, "death from gunshot wounds, inflicted while resisting arrest."

I was waiting downstairs after the dead wagon took the two bodies away. I wanted to see Detective Hoadley—and it wasn't about police business. When he came down, I hailed a taxi.

I said, "You and I've got a little business."

"Where?"

"Van Cortlandt Park ought to be a nice quiet place."

"For what?" Hoadley growled.

"For taking you apart, fella," I said. "I told you I would if you made another crack about my squaring a murder. You made it. I always keep my word."

Hoadley stared at me for a long moment and I saw the sweat start to break out on his face. But he was game.

"O. K.," he said. "Van Cortlandt Park."

I kept my word.

THE END.

WITH THE WHISPERER

Continued from page 6

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We get many requests for information about policemen and police work, and do the best we can to furnish whatever information is required. However, we know that a lot of our readers will save themselves time if they realize that their local police departments are always more than willing to give them whatever information they may have.

For example, many of our younger readers want to know where they can get police training, either in civil service training schools, community schools, or colleges. There are a great many such sources of training, and it is almost impossible for any one source to have all this information for each locality. If you ask your local police, they can give you the best information on that score. Your next best bet is to write to your State police, or your State attorney general. Both of these sources will be glad to give you information that is especially applicable to your own State.

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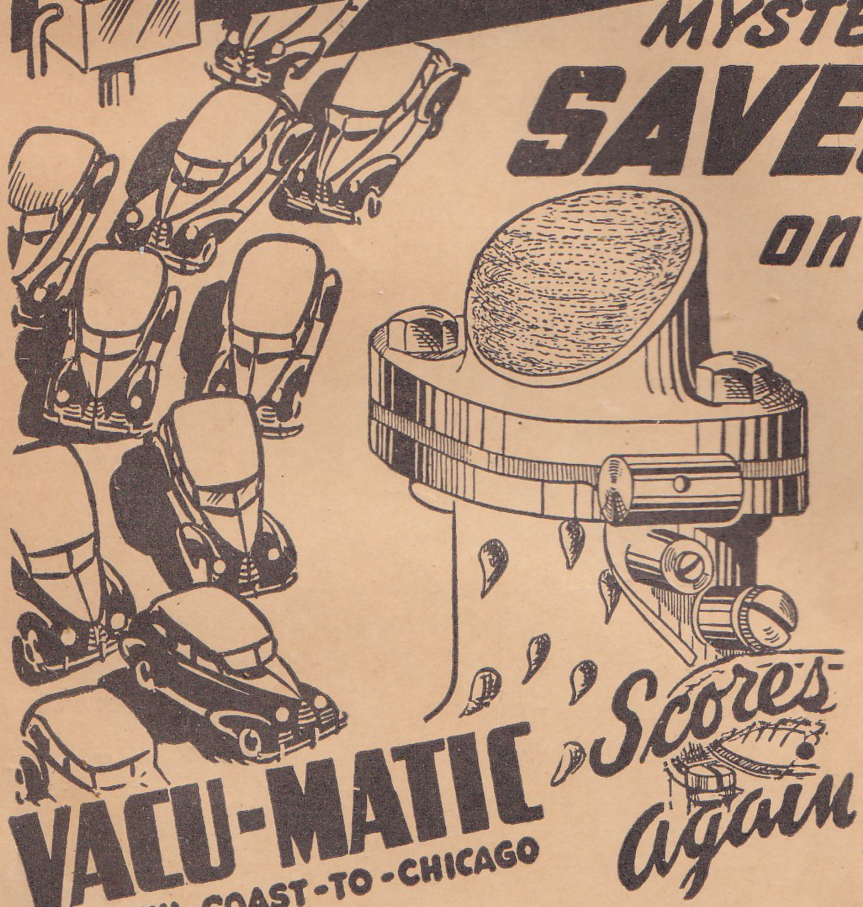

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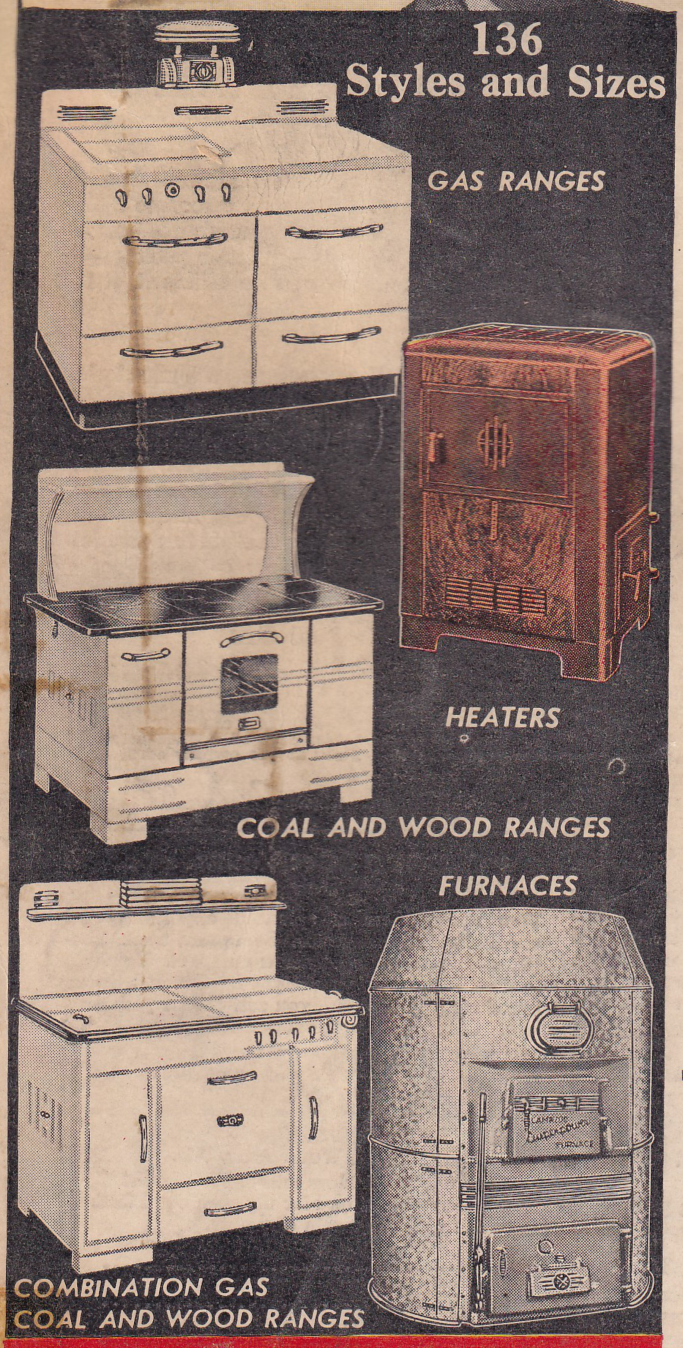

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